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LINDA CONDON

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BY

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NEW YORK
ALFRED · A · KNOPF
1919

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Linda

To
CARL VAN VECHTEN
This,
Linda Condon's
Gravest
Bow.

I

A BLACK bang was, but not ultimately, the most notable feature of her uncommon personality—straight and severe and dense across her clear pale brow and eyes. Her eyes were the last thing to remember and wonder about; in shade blue, they had a velvet richness, a poignant intensity of lovely color, that surprised the heart. Aside from that she was slim, perhaps ten years old, and graver than gay.

Her mother was gay for them both, and, therefore, for the entire family. No father was in evidence; he was dead and never spoken of, and Linda was the only child. Linda's dresses, those significant trivialities, plainly showed two tendencies—the gaiety of her mother and her own always formal gravity. If Linda appeared at dinner, in the massive Renaissance materialism of the hotel dining-room, with a preposterous magenta hair-ribbon on her shapely head, her mother had succeeded in expressing her sense of the appropriately decorative; while if Linda wore an unor-

namented but equally "unsuitable" frock of dark velvet, she, in her turn, had been vindicated.

Again, but far more rarely, the child's selection was evident on the woman. As a rule Mrs. Condon garbed her flamboyant body in large and expensive patterns or extremely tailored suits; and of the two, the evening satins and powdered arms barely retaining an admissible line, and the suits, the latter were the most, well—spectacular.

She was not dark in color but brightly golden; a gold, it must be said in all honesty, her own, a metallic gold crisply and solidly marcelled; with hazel-brown eyes, and a mouth which, set against her daughter's deep-blue gaze, was her particular attraction. It was rouged to a nicety, the under lip a little full and never quite against the upper. If Linda's effect was cool and remote, Mrs. Condon, thanks to her mouth, was reassuringly imminent. She was, too, friendly; she talked to women—in her not overfrequent opportunities—in a rapid warm inaccurate confession of almost everything they desired to hear. The women, of course, were continually hampered by the unfortunate fact that the questions nearest their hearts, or curiosity, were entirely inadmissible.

Viewed objectively, they all, with the exception

of Linda, seemed alike; but that might have been due to their common impressive setting. The Boscombe, in its way, was as lavish as Mrs. Condon's dresses. The main place of congregation, for instance, was a great space of white marble columns, Turkey-red carpet and growing palms. It was lighted at night indirectly by alabaster bowls hanging on gilded chains—a soft bright flood of radiance falling on the seated or slowly promenading women with bare shoulders.

Usually they were going with a restrained sharp eagerness toward the dining-room or leaving it in a more languid flushed repletion. There were, among them, men; but somehow the men never seemed to be of the least account. It was a women's paradise. The glow from above always emphasized the gowns, the gowns like orchids and tea-roses and the leaves of magnolias. It sparkled in the red and green and crystal jewels like exotic dew scattered over the exotic human flowers. Very occasionally there was a complacent or irritable masculine utterance, and then it was immediately lost in the dominant feminine sibilance.

Other children than Linda sped in the manner of brilliant fretful tops literally on the elaborate

outskirts of the throng; but they were as different from her as she was from the elders. Indeed Linda resembled the latter, rather than her proper age, remarkably. She had an air of responsibility, sometimes expressed in a troubled frown, and again by the way she hurried sedately through drifting figures toward a definite purpose and end.

Usually it was in the service of one of her mother's small innumerable requests or necessities; if the latter were sitting with a gentleman on the open hotel promenade that overlooked the sea and needed a heavier wrap, Linda returned immediately with a furred cloak on her arm; if the elder, going out after dinner, had brought down the wrong gloves, Linda knew the exact wanted pair in the long perfumed box; while countless trifles were needed from the convenient drug-store.

The latter was a place of white mosaic floor and glittering glass, with a marble counter heaped with vivid fruit and silver-covered bowls of sirups and creams with chopped nuts. Linda often found time to stop here for a delectable glass of assorted sweet compounds. She was on terms of intimacy with the colored man in a crisp linen

coat who presided over the refreshments, and he invariably gave her an extra spoonful of the marron paste she preferred. When at lunch, it might be, she cared for very little, her mother would complain absently:

"You must stop eating those sickening mixtures. They'd ruin any skin." At this she invariably found the diminutive mirror in the bag on her lap and glanced at her own slightly improved color. The burden of the feminine conversations in which Mrs. Condon was privileged to join, Linda discovered, was directed toward these overwhelming considerations of appearance. And their importance, communicated to her, resulted in a struggle between the desire to preserve her skin from ruin and the seductions of marron paste and maple chocolates.

Now, with an uncomfortable sense of impending disaster, she would hastily consume one or the other; again, supported by a beginning self-imposed inflexibility, she would turn steadily away from temptation. In the end the latter triumphed; and her normal appetite, always moderate, was unimpaired.

This spirit of resolution, it sometimes happened, was a cause of humorous dismay to her

mother. "I declare, Linda," she would observe with an air of helplessness, "you make me feel like the giddy one and as if you were mama. It's the way you look, so disapproving. I have to remind myself you're only—just how old are you? I keep forgetting." Linda would inform her exactly and the other sigh:

"The years slip around disgustingly. It seems only yesterday I was at my first party." Usually, in spite of Linda's eagerness to hear of that time when her mother was a girl, the elder would stop abruptly. On rare occasions solitary facts emerged from the recalled existence of a small town in the country. There were such details as buggy-riding and prayer-meetings and excursions to a Boiling Springs where the dancing-floor, open among the trees, was splendid. At these memories Mrs. Condon had been known to cry.

But she would recover shortly. Her emotions were like that—easily roused, highly colored and soon forgotten. She forgot, Linda realized leniently, a great deal. It wasn't safe to rely on her promises. However, if she neglected a particular desire of Linda's, she continually brought back unexpected gifts of candy, boxes of silk stockings, or lovely half-wilted flowers.

The flowers, they discovered, although they stayed fresh for a long while pinned to Linda's slim waist, died almost at once if worn by her mother. "It's my warm nature, I am certain," the latter proclaimed to her daughter; "while you are a little refrigerator. I must say it's wonderful how you keep your clothes the same. Neat as a pin." Somehow, with this commendation, she managed to include a slight uncomplimentary impatience. Linda didn't specially want to resemble a pin, a disagreeable object with a sharp point. She considered this in the long periods when, partly by preference, she was alone.

Seated, perhaps, in the elaborate marble and deep red of the Boscombe's reception-rooms, isolated in the brilliant expensive throng, she would speculate over what passed in the light of her own special problems. But nothing, really, came out to her satisfaction. There was, notably, no one she might ask. Her mother, approached seriously, declared that Linda gave her the creeps; while others made it plain that it was their duty to repress the forwardness inevitable from the scandalous neglect of her upbringing.

They, the women of the Boscombe, glancing at their finger-nails stained and buffed to a shin-

ing pale vermilion, lightly rubbing their rings on the dry palm of a hand, wondered pessimistically within Linda's hearing what could come out of such an association. That term, she vaguely gathered, referred to her mother. The latter evidently interested them tremendously; because, she explained, they had no affairs of their own to attend to. This was perfectly clear to Linda until Mrs. Condon further characterized them as "busy."

The women, stopped by conventions from really satisfactory investigation at the source, drew her on occasion into a laboriously light inquisition. How long would Linda and her mama stay at the Boscombe? Had they closed their apartment? Where was it? Hadn't Mrs. Condon mentioned Cleveland? Wasn't Linda lonely with her mama out so much—they even said late —in rolling chairs? Had she ever seen Mr. Jasper before his arrival last week?

No, of course she hadn't.

Here they exchanged skeptical glances beneath relentlessly pulled eyebrows. He was really very nice, Mr. Jasper. Linda in a matter-of-fact voice replied that he had given her a twenty-dollar gold piece. Mr. Jasper was very generous. But per-

haps he had rewarded her for being a good little girl and not—not bothering or hanging about. "Why should he?" was Linda's just perceptibly impatient response. Then they told her to be quiet because they wanted to listen to the music.

This consisted in studying, through suspended glasses in chased platinum, a discreet programme. At the end of a selection they either applauded condescendingly or told each other that they hadn't cared for that last—really too peculiar. Whichever happened, the leader of the small orchestra, an extravagant Italian with a supple waist, turned and bowed repeatedly with a grimacing smile. The music, usually Viennese, was muted and emotional; its strains blended perfectly with the floating scents of the women and the faintly perceptible pungent odors of dinner. Every little while a specially insinuating melody became, apparently, tangled in the women's breathing, and their breasts, cunningly traced and caressed in tulle, would be disturbed.

Mrs. Condon applauded more vigorously than was sanctioned by the others' necessity for elegance; the frank clapping of her pink palms never failed to betray a battery of affected and significant surprise in eyes like polished cold

agates. Linda, seated beside her parent, could be seen to lay a hand, narrow and blanched and marked by an emerald, on the elder's knee. Her pale fine lips moved rapidly with the shadow of trouble beneath the intense black bang.

"I wish you wouldn't do it so loudly, mother," was what she whispered.

II

THE jealously guarded truth was that, by her daughter at least, Mrs. Condon was adored. Linda observed that she was not like an ordinary mother, but more nearly resembled a youthful companion. Mrs. Condon's gaiety was as genuine as her fair hair. Not kept for formal occasion, it got out of bed with her, remained through the considerable difficulties of dressing with no maid but Linda, and if the other were not asleep called a cheerful or funny good night.

Their rooms were separated by a bath, but Linda was scarcely ever in her own—her mother's lovely things, acting like a magnet, constantly drew her to their arrangement in the drawers. When the laundry came up, crisp and fragile webs heaped on the bed, Linda laid it away in a sort of ritual. Even with these publicly invisible garments a difference of choice existed between the two: Mrs. Condon's preference was for insertions, and Linda's for shadow embroidery and fine shell edges. Mrs. Condon,

shaking into position a foam of ribbon and lace, would say with her gurgle of amusement, "I want to be ready when I fall down; if I followed your advice they'd take me for a nun."

This brought out Linda's low clear laugh, the expression of her extreme happiness. It sounded, for an instant, like a chime of small silver bells; then died away, leaving the faintest perceptible flush on her healthy pallor. At other times her mother's humor made her vaguely uncomfortable, usually after wine or other drinks that left the elder's breath thick and oppressive. Linda failed completely to grasp the allusions of this wit but a sharp uneasiness always responded like the lingering stale memory of a bad dream.

Once, at the Boscombe, her mother had been too silly for words: she had giggled and embraced her sweet little girl, torn an expensive veil to shreds and dropped a French model hat into the tub. After a distressing sickness she had gone to sleep fully dressed, and Linda, unable to move or wake her, had sat long beyond dinner into the night, fearful of the entrance of the chambermaid.

The next day Mrs. Condon had been humble with remorse. Men, she said, were too beastly

for description. This was not an unusual opinion. Linda observed that she was always condemning men in general and dressing for them in particular. She offered Linda endless advice in an abstracted manner:

"They're all liars, Lin, and stingy about everything but their pleasure. Women are different but men are all alike. You get sick to death of them! Never bother them when they are smoking a cigar; cigarettes don't matter. Leave the cigarette-smokers alone, anyhow; they're not as dependable as the others. A man with a good cigar—you must know the good from the bad—is usually discreet. I ought to bring you up different, but, Lord, life's too short. Besides, you will learn more useful things right with mama, whose eyes are open, than anywhere else.

"Powder my back, darling; I can't reach. If I'm a little late to-night go to sleep like a duck. You think Mr. Jasper's nice, don't you? So does mother. But you mustn't let him give you any more money. It'll make him conceited."

Linda wondered what she meant by the last phrase. How could it make Mr. Jasper conceited to give her a gold piece? However, she decided that she had better not ask.

It was like that with a great many of her mother's mysterious remarks—Linda had an instinctive feeling of drawing away. The other kissed her warmly and left a print of vivid red on her cheek.

She examined the mark in the mirror when her mother had gone; it was, she decided, the kiss made visible. Then she laid away the things scattered about the room by Mrs. Condon's hasty dressing. Her own belongings were always in precise order.

A sudden hesitation seized her at the thought of going down to the crowd at the music. The women made her uncomfortable. It wasn't what they said, but the way they said it; and the endless questions wearied her. She was, as well, continually bothered by her inability to impress upon them how splendid her mother was. Some of them she was certain did not appreciate her. Mrs. Condon at once admitted and was entertained by this, but it disturbed Linda. However, she understood the reason—when any nice men came along they always liked her mother best. This made the women mad.

The world, she gathered, was a place where women played a game of men with each other.

It was very difficult, she couldn't comprehend the rules or reason; and Linda was afraid that she would be unsuccessful and never have the perfect time her mother wanted for her. In the first place, she was too thin, and then she knew that she could never talk like her dearest. Perhaps when she had had some wine it would be different.

She decided, after all, to go down to the assemblage; and, by one of the white marble pillars, Mrs. Randall captured her. "Why, here's Linda-all-alone," Mrs. Randall said. "Mama out again?" Linda replied stoutly, "She has a dreadful lot of invitations."

Mrs. Randall, who wore much brighter clothes than her mother, was called by the latter an old buzzard. She was very old, Linda could see, with perfectly useless staring patches of paint on her wrinkled cheeks, and eyes that look as though they might come right out of her head. Her frizzled hair supported a dead false twist with a glittering diamond pin, and her soft cold hands were loaded with jewels. She frightened Linda, really, although she could not say why. Mrs. Randall was a great deal like the witch in a fairy-story, but that wasn't it. Linda hadn't the belief in witches necessary for dread. It might be her

scratching voice; or the way she turned her head, without any chin at all, like a turtle; or her dresses, which led you to expect a person very different from an old buzzard.

"Of course she does," said Mrs. Randall, "any number of invitations, and why shouldn't she? Your mother is very pleasant, to be sure." She nodded wisely to the woman beside her, Miss Skillern.

Miss Skillern was short and broad and, in the evening, always wore curled ostrich plumes on tightly filled gray puffs. She reminded Linda of a wadded chair. Mrs. Randall, after the other's slight stiff assent, continued:

"Your mama would never be lonely, not she. All I wonder is she doesn't get married again—with that blondine of hers. Wouldn't you rather have one papa than, in a way of speaking, a different one at every hotel?"

Linda, completely at a loss for answer, studied Mrs. Randall with her direct deep blue gaze. Miss Skillern again inclined her plumes. With the rest of her immobile she was surprisingly like one of those fat china figures with a nodding head. Linda was assaulted by the familiar bewildered feeling of not understanding what was said and,

at the same time, passionately resenting it from an inner sensitive recognition of something wrong.

"How could I have that?" she finally asked.

"How?" repeated Miss Skillern, breathing loudly.

"Yes, how?" Mrs. Randall echoed. "You can ask your mama. You really can. And you may say that, as a matter of fact, the question came from us," she included her companion.

"From you," Miss Skillern exactly corrected her.

"Indeed," the other cried heatedly, "from me! I think not. Didn't you ask? Answer me that, if you please. I heard you with my own ears say, 'How?' While now, before my face, you try to deny it." It was plain to Linda that Miss Skillern was totally unmoved by the charge. She moved her lorgnette up, gazing stolidly at the musical programme. "From you," she said again, after a little. Mrs. Randall suddenly regained her equilibrium.

"If the ladies of this hotel are afraid to face that creature I—I—am not. I'll tell her in a minute what a respectable person thinks of her goings-on. More than that, I shall complain to Mr. Rennert. 'Mr. Rennert,' I'll say, 'either she

leaves or me. Choose as you will. The reputation of your hotel—' " she spluttered and paused.

"Proof," Miss Skillern pronounced judicially; "proof. We know, but that's not proof."

"He has a wife," Mrs. Randall replied in a shrill whisper; "a wife who is an invalid. Mrs. Zoock, she who had St. Vitus' dance and left yesterday, heard it direct. George A. Jasper, woolen mills in Frankford, Pennsylvania. Mr. Rennert would thank me for that information."

They had forgotten Linda. She stood rigid and cold—they were blaming her mother for going out in a rolling chair with Mr. Jasper because he was married. But her mother didn't know that; probably Mr. Jasper had not given it a thought. She was at the point of making this clear, when it seemed to her that it might be better to say that her mother knew everything there was about Mr. Jasper's wife; she could even add that they were all friends.

Linda would have to tell her mother the second she came in, and then, of course, she'd stop going with Mr. Jasper. Men, she thought in the elder's phrase, were too beastly for words.

"After all," Mrs. Randall was addressing her

again, "you needn't say anything at all to your mama. It might make her so cross that she'd spank you."

"Mother never spanks me," Linda replied with dignity.

"If you were my little girl," said Miss Skillern, with rolling lips, "I'd put you over my knee with your skirts up and paddle you."

Never, Linda thought, had she heard anything worse; she was profoundly shocked. The vision of Miss Skillern performing such an operation as she had described cut its horror on her mind. There was a sinking at her heart and a misty threat of tears.

To avert this she walked slowly away. It was hardly past nine o'clock; her mother wouldn't be back for a long while, and she was too restless and unhappy to sit quietly above. Instead, she continued down to the floor where there were various games in the corridor leading to the billiard-room. The hall was dull, no one was clicking the balls about the green tables, and a solitary sick-looking man, with inky shadows under fixed eyes, was smoking a cigarette in a chair across from the cigar-stand.

He looked over a thick magazine in a chocolate cover, his gaze arrested by her irresolute passage. "Hello, Bellina," he said.

She stopped. "Linda," she corrected him, "Linda Condon." Obeying a sudden impulse, she dropped, with a sigh, into a place beside him.

"You're bored," he went on, the magazine put away. "So am I, but my term is short."

She wondered, principally, what he was doing, among so many women, at the Boscombe. He was different from Mr. Jasper, or the other men with fat stomachs, the old men with dragging feet. It embarrassed her to meet his gaze, it was so—so investigating. She guessed he was by the sea because he felt as badly as he looked. He asked surprisingly:

"Why are you here?"

"On the account of my mother," she explained. "But it doesn't matter much where I am. Places are all alike," she continued conversationally. "We're mostly at hotels—Florida in winter and Lake George in summer. This is kind of between."

"Oh!" he said; and she was sure, from that short single exclamation, he understood everything.

"Like all true beauty," he added, "it's plain that you are durable."

"I don't like the seashore," she went on easily; "I'd rather be in a garden with piles of flowers and a big hedge."

"Have you ever lived in a garden-close?"

"No," she admitted; "it's just an idea. I told mother but she laughed at me and said a roof-garden was her choice."

"Some day you'll have the place you describe," he assured her. "It is written all over you. I would like to see you, Bellina, in a space of emerald sod and geraniums." She decided to accept without further protest his name for her. "You are right, too, about the hedge—the highest and thickest in creation. I should recommend a pseudo-classic house, Georgian, rather small, a white façade against the grass. A Jacobean dining-room, dark certainly, the French windows open on dipping candle flames. You'd wear white, with your hair low and the midnight bang as it is now."

"That would be awfully nice," Linda replied vaguely. She sighed.

"But a very light drawing-room!" he cried. "White panels and arches and Canton-blue rugs

—the brothers Adam. A fluted mantel, McIntires, and a brass hod. Curiously enough, I always see you in the evening . . . at the piano. I'm not so bored, now." Little flames of red burned in either thin cheek. "What nonsense!" Suddenly he was tired. "This is a practical and earnest world," his voice grew thin and hurt her. "Yet beauty is relentless. You'll have your garden, but I shouldn't be surprised at difficulties first."

"It won't be so hard to get," she declared confidently. "I mean to choose the right man. Mother says that's the answer. Women, she says, won't use their senses."

"Ah."

Linda began to think this was a most unpleasant monosyllable.

"So that's the lay! Has she succeeded?"

"She has a splendid time. She's out tonight with Mr. Jasper in a rolling chair, and he has loads and loads of money. ..kes all the other women cross."

"Here you are, then, till she gets back?"

"There's no one else."

"But, as a parent, infinitely preferable to the righteous," he murmured. "And you—"

"I think mother's perfect," she answered simply.

He shook his head. "You won't succeed at it, though. Your mother, for example, isn't dark."

"The loveliest gold hair," she said ecstatically. "She's much much prettier than I'll ever be."

"Prettier, yes. The trouble is, you are lovely, magical. You will stay for a lifetime in the memory. The merest touch of you will be more potent than any duty or fidelity. A man's only salvation will be his blindness."

Although she didn't understand a word of this, Linda liked to hear him; he was talking as though she were grown up, and in response to the flattery she was magnetic and eager.

"One time," he said, "very long ago, beauty was worshiped. Men, you see, know better now. They want their dollar's worth. The world was absolutely different then—there were deep adventurous forests with holy chapels in the green combe for an orison, and hermits rising to Paradise on the *Te Deum Laudamus* of the angels and archangels. There were black castles and, in the broad meadows, silk tents with ivory pegs and poles of gold.

The enchantments were as thick as shadows

under the trees: perhaps the loveliest of women riding a snow-white mule, with a saddle cloth of red samite, or, wrapped in her shining hair, on a leopard with yellow eyes, lured you to a pavilion, scattered with rushes and flowers and magical herbs, and a shameful end. Or a silver doe would weep, begging you to pierce her with your sword, and, when you did, there knelt the daughter of the King of Wales.

"But I started to tell you about the worship of beauty. Plato started it although Cardinal Pietro Bembo was responsible for the creed. He lived in Italy, in an age like a lily. It developed mostly at Florence in the Platonic Academy of Cosomo and Pico della Mirandola. Love was the supreme force, and its greatest expression a desire beyond the body."

He gazed at Linda with a quizzical light in his eyes deep in shadow.

"Love," he said again, and then paused. "One set of words will do as well as another. You will understand, or not, with something far different from intellectual comprehension. The endless service of beauty. Of course, a woman—but never the animal; the spirit always. Born in the spirit, served in the spirit, ending in the

spirit. A direct contradiction, you see, to nature and common sense, frugality and the sacred symbol of the dollar.

"It wouldn't please your Mr. Jasper, with his heaps and heaps of money. Mr. Jasper would consider himself sold. But Novalis, not so very long ago, understood. . . . A dead girl more real than all earth. You mustn't suppose it to be mere mysticism."

Linda said, "Very well, I won't."

He nodded. "No one could call Michelangelo hysterical. Sometime in the history of man, of a salt solution, this divinity has touched them. Touched them hopefully, and perhaps gone—banished by the other destination. Or I can comprehend nature killing it relentlessly, since it didn't lead to propagation. Then, too, as much as was useful was turned into a dogma for politics and priests.

"You saw in the rushlight a woman against the arras; there was a humming of viola d'amore from the musicians' balcony; she smiled at you, lingering, and then vanished with a whisper of brocade de Lyons on a sanded floor. Nothing else but a soft white glove, eternally fragrant, in your habergeon, an eternally fragrant memory;

the dim vision in stone street and coppice; a word, a message, it might be, sent across the world of steel at death. And then, in the last flicker of vision, the arras and the clear insistent strings, the whispering brocade de Lyons on the landing.

"The philosophy of it," he said in a different tone, "is exact, even a scientific truth. But men have been more concerned with turning lead into gold; naturally the spirit has been neglected. The science of love has been incredibly soiled:

"The old gesture toward the stars, the bridge of perfection, the escape from the fatality of flesh. Yet it was a service of the body made incredibly lovely in actuality and still never to be grasped. Never to be won. It ought to be clear to you that realized it would diminish into quite a different thing—

" *'La figlia della sua mente, l'amorosa idea.'* "

His voice grew so faint that Linda could scarcely distinguish articulate sounds. All that he said, without meaning for her, stirred her heart. She was used to elder enigmas of speech; her normal response was instinctively emotional, and nothing detracted from the gravity of her attention.

"Not in pious men," he continued, more uncertain; "nor in seminaries of virtue. They

have their reward. But in men whose bitterness of longing grew out of hideous fault. The distinction of beauty—not a payment for prayers or chastity. The distinction of love . . . above chests of linen and a banker's talent and patents of nobility . . . Divine need. Idiotic. But what else, what better, offers?"

He was, she saw, terribly sick. His hands were clenched and his entire being strained and rigid, as though he were trying to do something tremendously difficult. At last, with infinite pain, he succeeded.

"I must get away," he articulated.

Linda was surprised at the effort necessary for this slight accomplishment when he had said the most bewildering things with complete ease. Well, the elevators were right in front of him. He rose slowly, and, with Linda standing at his side, dug a sharp hand into her shoulder. It hurt, but instinctively she bore it and, moving forward, partly supported him. She pressed the bell that signaled for the elevator and it almost immediately sank into view. "Hurry," he said harshly to the colored operator in a green uniform; and quite suddenly, leaving a sense of profound mystery, he disappeared.

III

LINDA decided that he had told her a rather stupid fairy story. She was too old for such ridiculous things as ladies in their shining hair on a leopard. She remembered clearly seeing one of the latter at a zoological garden. It had yellow eyes, but no one would care to ride on it. Her mother, she was certain, knew more about love than any man. His words faded quickly from her memory, but a confused rich sense stirred her heart, a feeling such as she experienced after an unusually happy day: white gloves and music and Mr. Jasper displeased.

A clock chimed ten, and she proceeded to her mother's room, where she must wait up with her information about Mr. Jasper's wife. She was furious at him for a carelessness that had brought her mother such unfavorable criticism. Everything had been put away before going down, and there was nothing for her to do. The time dragged tediously. The hands of the traveling-clock in purple leather on the dressing-table

moved deliberately around to eleven. A ringing of ice in one of the metal pitchers carried by the bell boys sounded from the corridor. There was the faint wail of a baby.

Suddenly and acutely Linda was lonely—a new kind of loneliness that had nothing to do with the fact that she was by herself. It was a strange cold unhappiness, pressing over her like a cloud and, at the same time, it was nothing at all. That is, there was no reason for it. The room was brightly lighted and, anyhow, she wasn't afraid of "things." She thought that at any minute she must cry like that baby. After a little she felt better; rather the unhappiness changed to wanting. What she wanted was a puzzle; but nothing else would satisfy her. It might be a necklace of little pearls, but it wasn't. It might be—. Now it was twelve o'clock. Dear, dear, why didn't she come back!

Music, awfully faint, and a whisper, like a dress, across the floor. Her emotion changed again, to an extraordinary delight, a glow like that which filled her at the expression of her adoration for her mother, but infinitely greater. She was seated, and she lifted her head with her eyes closed and hands clasped. The clock

pointed to one and her parent came into the room.

"Linda," she exclaimed crossly, "whatever are you doing up? A bad little girl. I told you to be asleep hours before this."

"There is something you had to know right away," Linda informed her solemnly. "I only just heard it from Mrs. Randall and Miss Skillern." Her mother's flushed face hardened. "Mr. Jasper is married," Linda said.

Mrs. Condon dropped with an angry flounce into a chair. Her broad scarf of sealskin slipped from one shoulder. Her hat was crooked and her hair disarranged. "So that's it," she said bitterly; "and they went to you. The dam' old foxes. They went to you, nothing more than a child."

Linda put in, "They didn't mean to; it just sort of came out. I knew you'd stop as soon as you heard. Wasn't it horrid of him?"

"And this," Mrs. Condon declared, "is what I get for being, yes—proper.

"I said to-night, 'George,' I said, 'go right back home. It's the only thing. They have a right to you.' I told him that only to-night. And, 'No, I must consider my little Linda.' If I had held up my finger," she held up a finger to

show the smallness of the act necessary, "where would we have all been?

"But this is what I get. You might think the world would notice a woman's best efforts. No, they all try to crowd her and see her slip. If they don't watch out I'll skid, all right, and with some one they least expect. I have opportunities."

Linda realized with a sense of confusion that her mother had known of Mr. Jasper's marriage all the while. But she had nobly tried to save him from something; just what Linda couldn't make out. The other's breath was heavy with drinking.

"You go to bed, Lin," she continued; "and thank you for taking care of mama. I hope to goodness you'll learn from all this—pick out what you want and make for it. Don't bother with the antique frumps, the disappointed old tabbies. Have your fun. There's nothing else. If you like a man, be on the level with him—give and take. Men are not saints and we're better for it; we don't live in a heaven. You've got a sweet little figure. Always remember mama telling you that the most expensive corsets are the cheapest in the end."

Linda undressed slowly and methodically, her mother's words ringing in her head. Always remember—but of course she would have the nicest things possible. . . . A keepsake and faint music. She thought, privately, that she was too thin; she'd rather be her mother, with shoulders like bunches of smooth pink roses. In bed, just as she was falling asleep, a sound disturbed her from the corridor above—the slow tramping of heavy feet, like a number of men carefully bearing an awkward object. She listened with suspended breath while they passed. The footfalls seemed to pound on her heart. Slowly slowly they went, unnatural and measured. They were gone now, but she still heard them. The crushing of her mother into bed followed with a deep sigh. The long fall of a wave on the shore was audible. Two things contended in her stilled brain—the mysterious feeling of desire and her mother's advice. They were separate and fought, yet they were strangely incomprehensibly joined.

IV

IN the morning Mrs. Condon, with a very late breakfast-tray in bed, had regained her usual cheerful manner. "The truth is," she told Linda, "I'm glad that Jasper man has gone. He had no idea of discretion; tired of them anyhow." Linda radiated happiness. This was the mother she loved above all others. Her mind turned a little to the man who had talked to her the night before. She wondered if he were better. His thin blanched face, his eyes gleaming uncomfortably in smudges, recurred to her. Perhaps he'd be down by the cigar-stand again. She went, presently, to see, but the row of chairs was empty.

However, the neglected thick brown-covered magazine was still on the ledge by which he had been sitting. There was a name on it, and while, ordinarily, she couldn't read handwriting, this was so clear and regular, but minutely small, that she was able to spell it out—Howard Welles.

It disappointed her not to find him; at lunch she observed nearly every one present, but still he

was lost. He wasn't listening to the music after dinner, nor below. A deep sense of disappointment grew within her. Linda wanted to see him, hear him talk; at times a sharp hurt in the shoulder he had grasped brought him back vividly. The next day it was the same, and finally, diffidently, she approached the hotel desk. A clerk she knew, Mr. Fiske, was rapidly sorting mail, and she waited politely until he had finished.

"Well?" he asked.

"I found this down-stairs," she said, giving him the magazine. "Perhaps he'll want it." Mr. Fiske looked at the written name, and then glanced sharply at her. "No," he told her brusquely, "he won't want it." He turned away with the magazine and left Linda standing irresolutely. She wanted to ask if Mr. Welles were still at the Boscombe; if the latter didn't want the magazine she'd love to have it. Linda couldn't tell why. But the clerk went into the treasurer's office and she was forced to move away.

Later, lingering inexplicably about the spot where she had heard so many bewildering words, a very different man spoke to her. He, Linda

observed, was smoking a cigar, a good one, she was certain. He was smallish and had a short bristling mustache and head partly bald. His shoes were very shiny and altogether he had a look of prosperity. "Hello, cutie!" he cried, capturing her arm. She responded listlessly. The other produced a crisp dollar bill. "Do you see the chocolates in that case?" he said, indicating the cigar-stand. "Well, get the best. If they cost more, let me know. Our financial rating is number one." Linda answered that she didn't think she cared for any. "All right," the man agreed; "sink the note in the First National Ladies Bank, if you know where that is."

He engineered her unwillingly onto a knee. "How's papa?" he demanded. "I suppose he will be here Saturday to take his family through the stores?"

She replied with dignity, "There is only my mother and me."

At this information he exclaimed "Ah!" and touched his mustache with a diminutive gold-backed brush from a leather case. "That's more than I have," he confided to her; "there is only myself. Isn't that sad? You must be sorry for the lonely old boy."

She wasn't. Probably he, too, had a wife somewhere; men were beastly. "I guess your mother wants a little company at times herself?"

Linda, straining away from him, replied, "Oh, dear, no; there are just packs of gentlemen whenever she likes. But she is tired of them all." She escaped and he settled his waistcoat.

"You mustn't run away," he admonished her; "nice children don't. Your mother didn't bring you up like that, I'm sure. She wouldn't like it."

Linda hesitated, plainly conveying the fact that, if she were to wait, he would have to say something really important.

"Just you two," he deliberated; "Miss and Mrs. Jones."

"Not at all," Linda asserted shortly; "our name is Condon."

"I wonder if you'd tell her this," he went on: "a gentleman's here by himself named Bardwell, who has seen her and admires her a whole lot. Tell her he's no young sprig but he likes a good time all the better. Dependable, too. Remember that, cutie. And he wouldn't presume if he had a short pocket. He knows class when he sees it."

"It won't do any good," Linda assured him in her gravest manner. "She said only this morning she was sick of them."

"That was before dinner," he replied cheerfully. "Things look different later in the day. You do what I tell you."

All this Linda dutifully repeated. Her mother was at the dressing-table, rubbing cream into her cheeks, and she paused, surveying her reflection in the mirror. "He was smoking a big cigar," Linda added. The other laughed. "What a sharp little thing you are!" she exclaimed. "A body ought to be careful what they tell you." She wiped off the cream and rubbed a soft pinkish powder into her skin.

"He saw me, did he?" she apparently addressed the glass. "Admired me a whole lot. Was he nice, Linda?" she turned. "Were his clothes right? You must point him out to me to-night. But do it carefully, darling. No one should notice. Your mother isn't on the shelf yet; she can hold her own, even in the Boscombe, against the whole barnyard."

Linda, at the entrance to the dining-room, whispered, "There he is." But immediately Mr. Bardwell was smiling and speaking to them.

"I had a delightful conversation with your little girl to-day," he told Mrs. Condon; "such a pretty child and well brought up."

"And good, too," her mother replied; "not a minute's trouble. The common sense of the grown; you'd never believe it."

"Why shouldn't I?" he protested gallantly. "Every reason to." Mrs. Condon blushed becomingly.

"She had to make up for a lot," she sighed.

An hour or more after dinner Mrs. Randall stopped Linda in the hall beyond the music. "Mama out?" she inquired brightly. "I thought Mr. Jasper left this morning?"

Linda told her that Mr. Jasper had gone; she added nothing else.

"I must look at the register," Mrs. Randall continued; "I really must."

Obeying an uncontrollable impulse Linda half cried, "I'd like to see you riding on a leopard!" A flood of misery enveloped her, and she hurried up to the silence of her mother's deserted room.

V

IT was on her fourteenth birthday that Linda noticed a decided change in her mother; a change, unfortunately, that most of all affected the celebrated good humors. In the first place Mrs. Condon spent an increasingly large part of the day before the mirror of her dressing-table, but without any proportionate pleasure; or, if there was a proportion kept, it exhibited the negative result of a growing annoyance. "God knows why they all show at once," she exclaimed discontentedly, seated—as customary—before the eminently truthful reflection of a newly discovered set of lines. "I'm not old enough to begin to look like a hag."

"Oh, mother," Linda protested, shocked, "you mustn't say such horrid things about yourself. Why, you're perfectly lovely, and you don't seem a speck older than you did years ago."

The other, biting her full underlip at the unwelcome fact in turn biting a full lower lip back at her, made no reply. Linda lingered for a

moment at her mother's ruffled pink shoulders; then, with a sigh, she turned to the reception-room of their small suite at the Hotel Gontram. It was a somber chamber furnished in red plush, with a complication of shades and gray-white net curtains at long windows and a deep green carpet. There was a fireplace, with a grate, supported by varnished oak pillars and elaborate mantel and glass, a glittering reddish center-table with a great many small odd shelves below, a desk with sheaves of hotel writing paper and the telephone.

The Gontram was entirely different from the hotels at the lakes or seashore or in the South. It was a solid part of a short block west of Fifth Avenue in the middle of the city. Sherry's filled a corner with its massive stone bulk and glimpses of dining-rooms with glittering chandeliers and solemn gaiety, then impressive clubs and wide entrances under heavy glass and metal, tall porters in splendid livery, succeeded each other to the Hotel Gontram and the dull thunder of the elevated trains beyond.

The revolving door, through which Linda sedately permitted herself to be moved, opened into a high space of numerous columns and benches,

writing-desks and palms. At the back was the white room where, usually alone, she had breakfast, while the dining-room, discreetly lighted, was at the left. It was more interesting here than, for example, at the Boscombe; people were always coming in or going, and there were quantities of men. She watched them arriving with shoals of leather bags in the brisk care of the bellboys, disappear into the elevator, and, if it was evening, come down in dinner coats with vivid silk scarfs folded over their white shirts.

The women were perpetually in street clothes or muffled in satin wraps; Linda only regarded them when they were exceptional. Usually she was intent on the men. It often happened that they returned her frank gaze with a smile, or stopped to converse with her. Sometimes it was an actor with a face dryly pink like a woman's from make-up; they were familiar and pinched her cheeks, calling her endearing names in conscious echoing voices as if they were quite hollow within. Then there were simply business men, who never appeared to take off their derby hats, and spoke to her of their little girls at home. She was entirely at ease with the latter—so many of her mother's friends were similar—and critically

valued the details of their dress, the cigar-cases with or without gold corners, the watch-chains with jeweled insignia, the cuff-links and embroidered handkerchiefs.

If her mother approached while Linda was so engaged the elder would linger with a faint smile, at which, now, the girl was conscious of a growing impatience. She'd rise with dignity and, if possible, escape with her parent from florid courtesies. This sense of annoyance oppressed her, too, in the dining-room, where her mother, a cocktail in her hand, would engage in long cheerful discussions with the captains or waiters. Other women, Linda observed, spoke with complete indifference and their attention on the *carte de jour.* Of course it was much more friendly to be interested in the servants' affairs—they told her mother about their wives and the number of their children, the difficulties of bringing both ends together, and served her with the promptest care; but instinctively Linda avoided any but the most formal contact.

She had to insist, as well, on paying the tips; for Mrs. Condon, her sympathies engaged, was quite apt to leave on the table a five-dollar bill or an indiscriminate heap of silver. "You are a

regular little Jew," she would reply lightly to Linda's protests. This, the latter thought, was unfair; for the only Jew she knew, Mr. Moses Feldt, an acquaintance of their present period in New York, was quite the most generous person she knew. "Certainly you don't take after your mama."

After she said this she always paused with tight lips. It was charged with the assumption that, while Linda didn't resemble her, she did very much a mysterious and unfavorably regarded personage. Her father, probably. More and more Linda wondered about him. He was dead, she knew, but that, she began to see, was no reason for the positive prohibition to mention him at all. Perhaps he had done something dreadful, with money, and had disgraced them all. Yet she was convinced that this was not so.

She had heard a great many uncomplimentary words applied to husbands, most of which she had been unable to comprehend; and she speculated blankly on them in her mother's connection. On the whole the women agreed that they were remarkably stupid and transparent, they protested that they understood and guided every move husbands made; and this surely gave her father no

opportunity for independent crime. She was held from questioning not so much by her mother's command—at times she calmly and successfully ignored that—as from its unfortunate effect on the elder.

Mrs. Condon would burn with a generalized anger that sank to a despondency fortified by the brandy flask. Straining embraces and tears, painful to support, would follow, or more unbearable silliness. The old difficulties with giggling or sympathetic chambermaids—Linda couldn't decide which was worse—then confronted her with the necessity for rigid lies, misery, and the procuring of sums of money from the bag in the top drawer. Altogether, and specially with the fresh difficulties of her mother's unaccountable irritation and apprehensions, things were frightfully complicated.

It was late afternoon in November, and the electric lights were on; however, they were lighted when they rose, whenever they were in the rooms, for it was always gloomy if not positively dark; the bedroom looked into a deep exterior well and the windows of the other chamber opened on an uncompromising blank wall. Yet Linda, now widely learned in such settings, rather liked her

present situation. They had occupied the same suite before, for one thing; and going back into it had given her a sense of familiarity in so much that always shifted.

Linda, personally, had changed very little; she was taller than four years before, but not a great deal; she was, perhaps, more graceful—her movements had become less sudden—more assured, the rapidly maturing qualities of her mind made visible; and she had gained a surprising repose.

Now, for example, she sat in a huge chair cushioned with black leather and thought, with a frowning brow, of her mother. It was clear that the latter was obviously worried about—to put it frankly—her face. Her figure, she repeatedly asserted, could be reasoned with; she had always been reconciled to a certain jolly stoutness, but her face, the lines that appeared about her eyes overnight, fairly drove her to hot indiscreet tears. She had been to see about it, Linda knew; and returned from numerous beauty-parlors marvelously rejuvenated—for the evening.

She had been painted, enameled, vibrated, massaged; she had had electric treatment, rays

and tissue builders; and once she had been baked. To-day the toilet table would be loaded with milkweed, cerates and vanishing cream; tomorrow they would all be swept away, given to delighted chambermaids, while Mrs. Condon declared that, when all was said, cold water and a rough towel was nature's way.

This afternoon, apparently everything, including hope, had failed. She was as cross as cross. From the manner in which she spoke it might have been Linda's fault. The worst of it was that even the latter saw that nothing could be done. Her mother was growing—well, a little tired in appearance. Swift tears gathered in Linda's eyes. She hadn't been quite truthful in that reassuring speech of hers. She set herself to the examination of various older women with whom she had more or less lately come in contact. How had they regarded and met the loss of whatever good looks they had possessed?

It was terribly mixed up, but, as she thought about it, it seemed to her that the world of women was divided into two entirely different groups, the ones men liked, and who had such splendid parties; and the ones who sat together and gossiped in sharp lowered voices. She hoped pas-

sionately that her mother would not become one of the latter for a long long while. But eventually it seemed that there was no escape from the circle of brilliantly dressed creatures with ruined faces who congregated in the hotels and whispered and nodded in company until they went severally to bed.

The great difference between one and the other, of course, was the favor of men. Their world revolved about that overwhelming fact. Her mother had informed her of this on a hundred occasions and in countless ways; but more by her actions, her present wretchedness, than by speech. It was perfectly clear to Linda that nothing else mattered. She was even beginning, in a vague way, to think of it in connection with herself; but still most of her preoccupation was in her mother. She decided gravely that a great deal, yet, could be done. For instance, lunch to-day:

Her mother had given her a birthday celebration at Henri's, the famous confectioner but a door or two from their hotel; and at the end, when a plate of the most amazing and delightful little cakes had been set on the table, the elder had eaten more than half. Afterwards she had sworn ruefully at her lack of character, begging

Linda—in a momentary return of former happy companionship—never to let her make such a silly pig of herself again. Then she got so tired, Linda continued her mental deliberations; if she could only rest, go away from cities and resorts for a number of months, the lines in turn would soon vanish.

The elder moved impatiently, with a fretful exclamation, in the inner room; from outside came the subdued dull ceaseless clamor of New York. Formerly it had frightened Linda; but her dread had become a wordless excitement at the thought of so much just beyond the windows; her hands grew cold and her heart suddenly pounded, destroying the vicarious image of her mother.

VI

"I WISH now I'd been different," Mrs. Condon said, standing in the door. Her dress was not yet on, but her underthings were fully as elaborate and shimmering as any gown could hope to be. "And above everything else, I am sorry for the kind of mother you've had." This was so unexpected, the other's voice was so unhappy, that Linda was startled. She hurried across the room and laid a slim palm on her mother's full bare arm. "Don't say that," Linda begged, distressed; "you've been the best in the world."

"You know nothing about it," the elder returned, momentarily seated, her hands clasped on her full silken lap. "But perhaps it's not too late. You ought to go to a good school, where you'd learn everything, but principally what a bad thoughtless mama you have."

"I shouldn't stay a second in a place where they said that," Linda declared. A new apprehension touched her. "You're not really think-

ing of sending me away!" she cried. "Why, you simply could not get along. You know you couldn't! The maids never do up your dresses right; and you'd be so lonely in the mornings you would nearly die."

"That's true," Mrs. Condon admitted wearily. "I would expire; but I was thinking of you—you're only beginning life; and the start you'll get with me is all wrong. Or, anyway, most people think so."

"They are only jealous."

"Will you go into the closet, darling, and pour out a teeny little sip from my flask; mama feels a thousand years old this evening."

Returning with the silver cup of the flask half full of pale pungent brandy Linda could scarcely keep the tears from spilling over her cheeks. She had never before felt so sad. Her mother hastily drank, the stinging odor was transferred to her lips; and there was a palpable recovery of her customary spirit.

"I don't know what gets over me," she asserted. "I'm certain, from what I've heard of them, that you wouldn't be a bit better off in one of those fashionable schools for girls. Women, young and older, were never meant to be a lot together

in one place. It's unnatural. They don't like each other, ever, and it's all hypocritical and nasty. You will get more from life, yes, and me. I'm honest, too honest for my own good, if the truth was known."

She rose and unconsciously strayed to the mirror over the mantel where she examined her countenance in absorbed detail.

"My skin is getting soft like putty," she remarked aloud to herself. "The thing is, I've had my time and don't want to pay for it. Blondes go quicker than dark women; you ought to last a long while, Linda." Mrs. Condon had turned, and her tone was again almost complaining, almost ill-natured. Linda considered this information with a troubled face. It was quite clear that it made her mother cross. "I've seen men stop and look at you right now, too, and you nothing more than a slip fourteen years old. Of course, when I was fifteen I had a proposal; but I was very forward; and somehow you're different—so dam' serious."

She couldn't help it, Linda thought, if she was serious; she really had a great deal to think about, their income among other things. If she didn't watch it, pay the bills every three months

when it arrived, her mother would never have a dollar in the gold mesh bag. Then, lately, the dresses the elder threatened to buy were often impossible; Linda learned this from the comments she heard after the wearing of evening affairs sent home against her earnest protests. They were, other women more discreetly gowned had agreed, ridiculous.

Linda calmly realized that in this her judgment was superior to her mother's. In other ways, too, she felt she was really the elder; and her dismay at the possibility of going away to school had been mostly made up of the realization of how much her mother's well-being was dependent on her.

Mrs. Condon, finishing her dressing in the bedroom, at times called out various injunctions, general or immediate. "Tell them to have a taxi at the door for seven sharp. Have you talked to that little girl in the black velvet?" Linda hadn't and made a mental note to avoid her more pointedly in the future. "Get out mother's carriage boots from the hall closet; no, the others—you know I don't wear the black with coral stockings. They come off and the fur sticks to my legs. It will be very gay to-night; I hope to heaven

Ross doesn't take too much again." Linda well remembered that the last time Ross had taken too much her mother's Directoire wrap had been completely torn in half. "There, it is all nonsense about my fading; I look as well as I ever did."

Mrs. Condon stood before her daughter like a large flame-pink tulle flower. Her bright gold hair was constrained by black gauze knotted behind, her bare shoulders were like powdered rosy marble and the floating skirts gathered in a hand showed marvelously small satin-tied carriage boots. Indeed Linda's exclamation of delight was entirely frank. She had never seen her mother more radiant. The cunningly applied rouge, the enhanced brilliancy of her long-lashed eyes, had perfectly the illusion of unspent beauty.

"Do stay down-stairs after dinner and play," the elder begged. "And if you want to go to the theatre, ask Mr. Bendix, at the desk, to send you with that chauffeur we have had so much. I positively forbid your leaving the hotel else. It's a comfort after all, that you are serious. Kiss mama—"

However, she descended with her mother in the elevator; there was a more public caress; and

the captain in the Chinese dining-room placed Linda at a small table against the wall. There she had clams—she adored iced clams—creamed shrimps and oysters with potatoes *bordure,* alligator-pear salad and a beautiful charlotte cream with black walnuts. After this she sedately instructed the captain what to sign on the back of the dinner check—Linda Condon, room five hundred and seven—placed thirty-five cents beside the finger-bowl for the waiter, and made her way out to the news stand and the talkative girl who had it in charge. Exhausting the possibilities of gossip, and deciding not to go out to the theatre—in spite of the news girl's exciting description of a play called "The New Sin"—she was walking irresolutely through the high gilded and marble assemblage space when, unfortunately, she was captured by Mr. Moses Feldt.

VII

HE led her to a high-backed lounge against the wall, where, seated on its extreme edge, he gazed silently at her with an expression of sentimental concern. Mr. Moses Feldt was a short round man, bald but for a fluffy rim of pale hair, and with the palest imaginable eyes in a countenance perpetually flushed by the physical necessity of accommodating his rotundity to awkward edges and conditions. As usual he was dressed with the nicest care—a band of white linen laid in the opening of his waistcoat, his scarf ornamented by a pear-shaped pearl on a diamond finished stem; his cloth-topped varnished black shoes glistened, while his short fat fingers clasped a prodigious unlighted cigar. At last, in a tone exactly suited to his gaze, he exclaimed:

"So that naughty mama has gone out again and deserted Moses and her little Linda!" In what way her mother had deserted Mr. Feldt she failed to understand. Of course he wanted to

marry them—the comprehensive phrase was his own—but that didn't include him in whatever they did. Principally it made a joke for their private entertainment. Mrs. Condon would mimic his eager manner, "Stella, let me take you both home where you'll have the best in the land." And, "Ladies like you ought to have a loving protection." Linda would laugh in her cool bell-like manner, and her mother add a satirical comment on the chance any Moses Feldt had of marrying her.

Linda at once found him ridiculous and a being who forced a slighting warmth of liking. His appearance was preposterous, the ready emotion often too foolish for words; but underneath there was a—a goodness, a mysterious quality that stirred her heart to recognition. Certain rare things in life and experience affected her like that memory of an old happiness. She could never say what they might be, they came at the oddest times and by the most extraordinary means; but at their occurrence she would thrill for a moment as if in response to a sound of music.

It was, for example, absurd that Mr. Moses Feldt, who was a Jew, should make her feel like

that, but he did. And all the while that she was disagreeable to him, or mocking him behind his back, she was as uncomfortable and "horrid" as possible. While this fact, of course, only served to make her horrider still. At present she adopted the manner of a patience that nothing could quite exhaust; she was polite and formal, relentlessly correct in position.

Mr. Moses Feldt, the cigar in his grasp, pressed a hand to the probable region of his heart. "You don't know how I think of you," he protested, tears in his eyes; "just the idea of you exposed to anything at all in hotels keeps me awake nights. Now it's a drunk, or a fresh feller on the elevator, or—"

"It's nice of you," Linda said, "but you needn't worry. No one would dare to bother us. No one ever has."

"You wouldn't know it if they did," he replied despondently, "at your age. And then your mother is so trustful and pleasant. Take those parties where she is so much—roof frolics and cocoanut groves and submarine cafés; they don't come to any good. Rowdy." Linda studied him coldly; if he criticized them further she would leave. He mopped a shining brow with

a large colorful silk handkerchief. "It throws me into a sweat," he admitted.

"Really, Mr. Feldt, you mustn't bother," she told him in one of her few impulses of friendliness. "You see, we are very experienced." He nodded without visible happiness at this truth. "I'm a jackass!" he cried. "Judith tells me that all the time. If you could only see my daughters," he continued with a new vigor; "such lovely girls as they are. One dark like you and the other fair as a daisy. Judith and Pansy. And my home that darling mama made before she died." The handkerchief was again in evidence.

"Women and girls are funny. I can't get you there and not for nothing will Judith make a step. It may be pride but it seems to me such nonsense. I guess I'm old-fashioned and love's old-fashioned. Homes have gone out of style with the rest. It's all these restaurants and roofs now, yes, and studios. I tell the girls to stay away from them and from artists and so on. I don't encourage them at the apartment—a big lump of a feller with platinum bracelets on his wrists. What kind of a man would that be! I'd like to know who'd buy goods from him.

"Sometimes, I'm sorry I got a lot of money, but it made mama happy. When she laid there at the last sick and couldn't live, I said, 'Oh, if you only won't leave me I'll give you gold to eat.' " He was so moved, his face so red, that Linda grew acutely embarrassed. People were looking at them. She rose stiffly but, in spite of her effort to escape him, he caught both her hands in his:

"You say I'm an old idiot like Judith," he begged. This Linda declined to do. And, "Ask your mother if you won't come to dinner with the girls and me, cozy and at home—just once."

"I'm afraid it will do no good," she admitted; "but I'll try." She realized that he was about to kiss her and moved quickly back. "I am almost afraid of you," he told her; "you're so distant and elegant. Judith and Pansy would get on with you first rate. I'll telephone tomorrow, in the afternoon. If the last flowers I sent you came I never heard of it."

She thanked him appropriately for the roses and stood, erect and impersonal, as a man in the hotel livery helped him into a coat. Mr. Moses Feldt waved the still unlighted cigar at her and disappeared through the rotating door to the street.

She gave a half-affected sigh of relief. Couldn't he see that her mother would never marry him. At the same time the strange thrill touched her; the sense of his absurdity vanished and she no longer remembered him perched like a painted rubber ball on the edge of the lounge.

In the somber red plush and varnished wood of the reception-room of their suite he seemed again charming. Perhaps it was because he, too, adored her mother. That wasn't the reason. The familiar rare joy lingered. It seemed now as though she were to capture and understand it . . . there was the vibration of music; and then, as always, she felt at once sad and brave. But, in spite of her old effort to the contrary, the feeling died away. Some day it would be clear to her; in the meanwhile Mr. Moses Feldt became once more only ridiculous.

VIII

IN the morning she was dressed and had returned from breakfast before her mother stirred. The latter moved sharply, brought an arm up over her head, and swore. It was a long while before she got up or spoke again, and Linda never remembered her in a worse temper. When, finally, she came into the room where the breakfast-tray was laid, Linda was inexpressibly shocked—all that her mother had dreaded about her appearance had come disastrously true. Her face was hung with shadows like smudges of dirt and her eyes were netted with lines.

Examining the dishes with distaste she told Linda that positively she could slap her for letting them bring up orange-juice. "How often must I explain to you that it freezes my fingers." Linda replied that she had repeated this in the breakfast-room and perhaps they had the wrong order. Neither her mother nor she said anything more until Mrs. Condon had finished her coffee and started a second cigarette. Then Linda related something of Mr. Moses Feldt's call on the

evening before. "He cried right into his handkerchief," she said, "until I thought I should sink."

Mrs. Condon eyed her daughter speculatively. "Now if you were only four years older," she declared, "it would be a good thing. He was simply born to be a husband." Horror filled Linda at the other's implication. "Yes," the elder insisted; "you couldn't do better; except, perhaps, for those girls of his. But then you'd have no trouble making them miserable. It's time to talk to you seriously about marriage." The smoke from the cigarette eddied in a gray veil across her unrefreshed face.

"You're old for your age, Linda; your life has made you that; and, like I said last night, it is rather better than not. Well, for you marriage, and soon as possible, is the proper thing. Mind, I have never said a word against it; only what suits one doesn't suit another. Where it wouldn't be anything more than an old ladies' home to me you need it early and plenty. You are too intense. That doesn't go in the world. Men don't like it. They want their pleasure and comfort without strings tied to them; the intensity has to be theirs.

"What you must get through your head is that love—whatever it is—and marriage are two different things, and if you are going to be successful they must be kept separate. You can't do anything with a man if you love him; but then you can't do anything with him if he doesn't love you. That's the whole thing in a breath. I am not crying down love, either; only I don't want you to think it is the bread and butter while it's nothing more than those little sweet cakes at Henri's.

"Now any girl who marries a poor man or for love—they are the same thing—is a fool and deserves what she gets. No one thanks her for it, him least of all; because if she does love him it is only to make them miserable. She's always at him—where did he go and why did he stay so long, and no matter what he says she knows it's a lie. More times than not she's right, too. I can't tell you too often—men don't want to be loved, they like to be flattered and flattered and then flattered again. You'd never believe how childish they are.

"Make them think they're it and don't give too much—that's the secret. Above all else don't be easy on them. Don't say 'all right, darling, next

spring will do as well for a new suit.' Get it then and let him worry about paying for it, if worry he must. If they don't give it to you some one smarter will wear it. But I started to talk about getting married.

"Choose a Moses Feldt, who will always be grateful to you, and keep him at it. They are so easy to land it's a kind of shame, too. Perhaps I am telling you this too soon, but I don't want any mistakes. Well, pick out your Moses—and mama will help you there—and suddenly, at the right time, show him that you can be affectionate; surprise him with it and you so staid and particular generally. Don't overdo it, promise more than you ever give—

"In the closet, dearie, just a little. That's a good girl. Mama's so dry." She rose, the silver cup of the flask in her hand, and moved inevitably to the mirror. "My hair's a sight," she remarked; "all strings. I believe I'll get a permanent wave. They say it lasts for six months or more, till the ends grow out. Makes a lot of it, too, and holds the front together. If you've ever had dye in your hair, I hear, it will break off like grass."

Linda pondered over what she had been told

of love and marriage; on the whole the exposition had been unsatisfactory. The latter she was able to grasp, but her mother had admitted an inability exactly to fix love. One fact, apparently, was clear—it was a nuisance and a hindrance to happiness, or rather to success. Love upset things. Still she had the strongest objection possible to living forever with a man like Mr. Moses Feldt. At once all that she had hoped for from life grew flat and uninteresting. She had no doubt of her mother's correctness and wisdom; the world was like that; she must make the best of it.

There was some telephoning, inquiries, and she heard the elder make an appointment with a hair-dresser for three that afternoon. She wondered what it would be like to have your hair permanently waved and hoped that she would see it done. This, too, she realized, was a part of the necessity of always considering men—they liked your hair to be wavy. Hers was as straight and stupid as possible. She, in turn, examined herself in a mirror: the black bang fell exactly to her eyebrows, her face had no color other than the carnation of her lips and her deep blue eyes. She moved away and critically studied her

figure; inches and inches too thin, she decided. Undoubtedly her mother was right, and she must marry at the first opportunity—if she could find a man, a rich man, who was willing.

Her thoughts returned vaguely to the mystery, the nuisance, of love. Surely she had heard something before, immensely important, about it, and totally different from all her mother had said. Her mind was filled with the fantastic image of a forest, of dangers, and a fat china figure with curled plumes, a nodding head, that brushed her with fear and disgust. A shuddering panic took possession of her, flashes burned before her eyes, and she ran gasping to the perfumed soft reassurances of her mother.

IX

IN a recurrence of her surprising concern of the day before Mrs. Condon declined to leave her dearest Linda alone; and, their arms caught together in a surging affection, they walked down Fifth Avenue toward the hairdresser's. There was a diffused gray sparkle of sunlight—it was early for the throngs—through which they passed rapidly to the accompaniment of a rapid eager chatter. Linda wore a deep smooth camel's hair cape, over which her intense black hair poured like ink, and her face was shaded by a dipping green velvet hat. Her mother, in one of the tightly cut suits she affected, had never been more like a perfect companion.

They saw, in the window of a store for men, a set of violent purple wool underwear, and barely escaped hysterics at the thought of Mr. Moses Feldt in such a garb. They giggled idiotically at the spectacle of a countryman fearfully making the sharp descent from the top of a lurching omnibus. And then, when they had reached the place

of Mrs. Condon's appointment, stopped at the show of elaborately waved hair on wax heads and chose which, probably, would resemble the elder and which, in a very short while now, Linda.

There was an impressive interior, furnished in gray panels and silvery wood; and the young woman at the desk was more surprisingly waved than anything they had yet seen. M. Joseph would be ready almost immediately; and in the meanwhile Mrs. Condon could lay aside her things in preparation for the hair to be washed. She did this while Linda followed every movement with the deepest interest.

At the back of the long room was a succession of small alcoves, each with an important-looking chair and mirror and shelves, a white basin, water-taps and rubber tubes. Settled in comfort, Mrs. Condon's hair was spread out in a bright metal tray fastened to the back of the chair, and the attendant, a moist tired girl in a careless waist, sprayed the short thick gold-colored strands.

"My," she observed, "what some wouldn't give for your shade! Never been touched, I can see, either. A lady comes in with real Titian, but yours is more select. It positively is. Lillian

Russell." While she talked her hands sped with incredible rapidity and skill. "The gentlemen don't notice it; of course not; oh, no! There was a girl here, a true blonde, but she didn't stay long —her own car, yes, indeed. Married her right out of the establishment. There wasn't any nonsense to her.

"So this is your little girl! I'd never have believed it. Not that she hasn't a great deal of style, a great deal—almost, you might say, like an Egyptian. In the movies last night; her all over. It's a type that will need studying. Bertha Kalich. But for me—"

Already, Linda saw, this part of the operation was done. The girl wheeled into position a case that had a fan and ring of blue flickering flames, and a cupped tube through which hot air was poured over her mother's head. M. Joseph strutted in, a small carefully dressed man with a diminutive pointed gray beard and formal curled mustache. He spoke with what Linda supposed was a French accent, and his manners, at least to them, were beautiful. But because the girl had not put out the blue flames quickly enough he turned to her with a voice of quivering rage.

It was so unexpected, in the middle of his bowing and smooth assurances, that Linda was startled, and had to think about him all over. The result of this was a surprising dislike; she hated, even, to see him touch her mother, as he unnecessarily did in directing them into the enclosure for the permanent wave.

The place itself filled her with the faint horror of instruments and the unknown. Above the chair where Mrs. Condon now sat there was a circle in the ceiling like the base of a chandelier and hanging down from it on twisted green wires were a great number of the strangest things imaginable: they were as thick as her wrist, but round, longer and hollow, white china inside and covered with brown wrapping. The wires of each, she discovered, led over a little wheel and down again to a swinging clock-like weight. In addition to this there were strange depressing handles on the wall by a dial with a jiggling needle and clearly marked numbers.

The skill of the girl who had washed her mother's hair, however, was slight compared with M. Joseph's dexterity. The comb flashed in his white narrow hands; in no time at all every knot was urged out into a shining smoothness. "Just

the front?" he inquired. Not waiting for Mrs. Condon's reply, he detached a strand from the mass over her brow, impaled it on a hairpin, while he picked up what might have been a thick steel knitting-needle with one end fastened in the middle of a silver quarter. The latter, it developed, had a hole in it, through which he drew the strand of hair, and then wrapped it with an angry tightness about the long projection.

At this exact moment a new girl, but tired and moist, appeared, took a hank of white threads from a dressing-table, and tied that separate lock firmly. This, Linda counted, was repeated fifteen times; and when it was accomplished she was unable to repress a nervous laughter. Really, her mother looked too queer for words: the long rigid projections stood out all over her head like—like a huge pincushion; no, it was a porcupine. Mrs. Condon smiled in uncertain recognition of her daughter's mirth.

Then Linda's attention followed M. Joseph to a table against a partition, where he secured a white cotton strip from a film of them soaking in a shallow tray, took up some white powder on the blade of a dessert knife and transferred it to the strip. This he wrapped and wrapped about the

hair fastened on a spindle, tied it in turn, and dragged down one of the brown objects on wires, which, to Linda's great astonishment, fitted precisely over the cotton-bound hair. Again, fifteen times, M. Joseph did this, fastening each connection with the turn of a screw. When so much was accomplished her mother's hair, it seemed, had grown fast to the ceiling in a tangle of green ends. It was the most terrifying spectacle Linda had ever witnessed. Obscure thoughts of torture, of criminals executed by electricity, froze her in a set apprehension.

The hair-dresser stepped over to the dials on the wall, and, with a sharp comprehensive glance at his apparatus, moved a handle as far as it would go. Nothing immediately happened, and Linda gave a relaxing sigh of relief. M. Joseph, however, became full of a painful attention.

X

HE brought into view an unsuspected tube, with a cone of paper at its end, and bent over her mother, directing a stream of cold air against her head. "How do you feel?" he asked, with, Linda noticed, a startling loss of his first accent. Mrs. Condon so far felt well enough. Then, before Linda's startled gaze, every single one of the fifteen imprisoning tubes began to steam with an extraordinary vigor; not only did they steam, like teapots, but drops of water formed and slowly slid over her mother's face. If the process appeared weird at the beginning, now it was utterly fantastic.

The little white vapor spurts played about Mrs. Condon's dripping countenance; they increased rather than diminished; actually it resembled a wrecked locomotive she had once seen. "How are you?" M. Joseph demanded nervously. "Is it hot anywhere?" With a sudden gesture she replied in a shaking voice, "Here."

Instantly he was holding the paper cone with

its cold air against her scalp, and the heat was subdued. He glanced nervously at his watch, and Mrs. Condon managed to ask, "How long?"

"Twenty minutes."

Dangerous as the whole proceeding seemed nothing really happened, and Linda's fears gradually faded into a mere curiosity and interest. A curtain hung across the door to the rest of the establishment, but it had been brushed partly aside; and she could see, in the compartment they had vacated, another man bending with waving irons over the liberated mass of a woman's hair. He was very much like M. Joseph, but he was younger and had only a dark scrap of mustache. As he caught up the hair with a quick double twist he leaned very close to the woman's face, whispering with an expression that never changed, an expression like that of the wax heads in the show-case. He bent so low that Linda was certain their cheeks had touched. She pondered at length over this, gazing now at the man beyond and now at M. Joseph flitting with the cold-air tube about her mother; wondering if, when she grew older, she would like a hair-dresser's cheek against hers. Linda decided not. The idea didn't shock her, the woman in the other space

plainly liked it; still she decided she wouldn't. A different kind of man, she told herself, would be nicer.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a sharp, unpleasant odor—the odor of scorched hair; and she was absolutely rigid with horror at an agonized cry from her mother.

"It's burning me terribly," the latter cried. "Oh, I can't stand it. Stop! Stop!"

M. Joseph, as white as plaster, rushed to the wall and reversed the handle, and Mrs. Condon started from the chair, her face now streaming with actual tears; but before she could escape the man threw himself on her shoulders.

"You mustn't move," he whispered desperately, "you'll tear your hair out. I tell you no harm's been done. Everything is all right. Please please don't cry like that. It will ruin my business. There are others in the establishment. Stop!" he shook her viciously.

Linda had risen, terrorized; and Mrs. Condon, with waving plucking hands, was sobbing an appeal to be released. "My head, my head," she repeated. "I assure you"—the man motioned to a pallid girl to hold her in the chair. With a towel to protect his hand he undid a screw, lifted

off the cap and untwisted the cotton from a bound lock of hair; releasing it, in turn, from the spindle it fell forward in a complete corkscrew over Mrs. Condon's face.

"Do you see!" he demanded. "Perfect. I give you my word they'll all be like that. The cursed heat ran up on me," he added in a swift aside to his assistant. "Has Mrs. Bellows gone? Who's still in the place? Here, loose that binding . . . thank God, that one is all right, too."

Together they unfastened most of the connections, and a growing fringe of long remarkable curls marked Mrs. Condon's pain-drawn and dabbled face. Linda sobbed uncontrollably; but perhaps, after all, nothing frightful had happened. Her poor mother! Then fear again tightened about her heart at the perturbed expression that overtook the hair-dresser. He was trying in vain to remove one of the caps. She caught enigmatic words—"the borax, crystallized . . . solid. It would take a plumber . . . have to go."

The connection was immovable. Even in her suffering Mrs. Condon implored M. Joseph to save her hair. Nothing, however, could be done; he admitted it with pale lips. The thing might

be chiseled off; in the end he tried to force a release and the strand, with a renewal of Mrs. Condon's agony—now, in the interest of her appearance, heroically withstood—snapped short in the container.

Rapidly recovering her vigor, she launched on a tirade against M. Joseph and his permanent waving establishment—Linda had never before heard her mother talk in such a loud brutal manner, nor use such heated unpleasant words, and the girl was flooded with a wretched shame. Still another lock, it was revealed, had been ruined, and crumbled to mere dust in its owner's fingers.

"The law will provide for you," she promised.

"Your hair was dyed," the proprietor returned vindictively. "The girl who washed it will testify. Every one is warned against the permanent if their hair has been colored. So it was at your own risk."

"My head's never been touched with dye," Mrs. Condon shrilly answered. "You lying little ape. And well does that young woman know it. She complimented me herself on a true blonde." The girl had, too, right before Linda.

"You ought to be thrashed out of the city."

"Your money will be given back to you," M. Joseph told her.

Outside they found a taxi, and sped back to their hotel. Above, Mrs. Condon removed her hat; and, before the uncompromising mirror, studied her wrecked hair—a frizzled vacancy was directly over her left brow—and haggard face. When she finally turned to Linda, her manner, her words, were solemn.

"I'm middle-aged," she said.

A dreary silence enveloped them sitting in the dark reception-room while Mrs. Condon restlessly shredded unlighted cigarettes on the floor. She had made no effort to repair the damages to her appearance, and when the telephone bell sharply sounded, she reached out in a slovenly negligence of manner. Linda could hear a blurred articulation and her mother answering listlessly. The latter at last said: "Very well, at seven then; you'll stop for us." She hung up the receiver, stared blankly at Linda, and then went off into a harsh mirth. "Oh, my God!" she cried; "the old ladies' home!"

XI

WITH her mother away on a wedding-trip with Mr. Moses Feldt, Linda was suddenly projected into the companionship of his two daughters. One, as he had said, was light, but a different fairness from Mrs. Condon's—richly thick, like honey; while Judith, the elder, who must have been twenty, was dark in skin, in everything but her eyes, which were a contrasting ashen-violet. She spoke at once of Linda's flawless whiteness:

"A magnolia," she said, in a deliberate dark voice; "you are quite a gorgeous child. Do you mind my saying that your clothes are rather quaint? They aren't inevitable, and yours ought to be that."

They were at lunch in the Feldt dining-room, an interior of heavy ornately carved black wood, panels of Chinese embroidery in imperial yellow, and a neutral mauve carpet. The effect, with glittering iridescent pyramids of glass, massive frosted repoussè silver, burnished gold-plate and

a wide table decoration of orchids and fern, was tropical and intense. It was evident to Linda that the Feldts were very rich indeed.

The entire apartment resembled the dining-room, while the building itself filled a whole city block, with a garden and fountains like an elaborate public square. Linda, however, wasn't particularly impressed by such show; she saw that Judith and Pansy had expected that of her; but she was determined not to exhibit a surprise that would imply any changes in her mother's and her condition. In addition, Linda calmly took such surroundings for granted. Her primary conception of possible existence was elegance; its necessity had so entered into her being that it had departed from her consciousness.

"I must take you to Lorice," Judith continued; "she will know better than any one else what you ought to have. You seem terribly pure—at first. But you're not a snowdrop; oh, no—something very rare in a conservatory. Much better style than your mother."

"I hope you won't mind Judith," Pansy put in; "she's always like that." A silence followed in which they industriously dipped the leaves of mammoth artichokes into a buttery sauce.

Linda, as customary, said very little, she listened with patient care to the others and endeavored to arrive at conclusions. She liked Pansy, who was as warm and simple as her father. Judith was harder to understand. She was absorbed in color and music, and declared that ugliness gave her a headache at once. Altogether, Linda decided, she was rather silly, especially about men; and at times her emotions would rise beyond control until she wept in a thin hysterical gasping.

The room where, mostly, they sat was small, but with a high ceiling, and hung in black, with pagoda-like vermilion chairs. The light, in the evening, was subdued; and Pansy and Judith, in extremely clinging vivid dresses, the former's hair piled high in an amber mass and Judith's drawn severely across her ears, were lovely. Linda thought of the tropical butterflies of the river Amazon, of orchids like those always on the dining-room table. A miniature grand piano stood against the drapery, and Judith often played. Linda learned to recognize some of the composers. Pansy liked best the modern waltzes; Judith insisted that Richard Strauss was incomparable; but Linda developed an overwhelming preference for Gluck. The older girl insisted that this was an

affectation; for a while she tried to confuse Linda's knowledge; but finally, playing the airs of "Orpheus and Eurydice," she admitted that the latter was sincere.

"They sound so cool," Linda said in a clear and decided manner.

There was a man with them, and he shook his head in a mock sadness. "So young and yet so formal. If, with the rest, you had Judith's temperament, you would be the most irresistible creature alive. For see, my dear child, as it is you stir neither tenderness nor desire; you are remote and perfect, and faintly wistful. I can't imagine being human or even comfortable with you about. Then, too, you have too much wisdom."

"She is frightful," Pansy agreed; "she's never upset nor her hair a sight; and, above all else, Linda won't tell you a thing."

"Some day," Judith informed them from the rippling whisper of the piano, "she will be magnificently loved."

"Certainly," the man continued; "but what will Linda, Linda Condon, give in return?"

"It's a mistake to give much," Linda said evenly.

"No, no, no!" Judith cried. "Give everything; spend every feeling, every nerve."

"You are remarkable, of course; almost no women have the courage of their emotions." His name was Reynold Chase, a long thin grave young man in a dinner coat, who wrote brilliant and successful comedies. "Yet Linda isn't parsimonious." He turned to her. "Just what are you? What do you think of love?"

"I haven't thought about it much," she replied slowly. "I'm not sure that I know what it means. At least it hasn't anything to do with marriage—"

"Ah!" he interrupted her.

Her usually orderly mind grew confused; it eddied as though with the sound of the piano. "It is not marriage," she vaguely repeated her mother's instruction. Reynold Chase supported her.

"That destroys it," he asserted. "This love is as different as possible from the ignominious impulse eternally tying the young into knots. It's anti-social."

"How stupid you are, Reynold," Pansy protested. "If you want to use those complicated

words take Judith into the drawing-room. I'm sure Linda is dizzy, too."

The latter's mental confusion lingered; she had a strong sense of having heard Reynold Chase say these strange things long before. Judith left the piano, sat beside him, and he lightly kissed her. A new dislike of Judith Feldt deepened in Linda's being. She had no reason for it, but suddenly she felt absolutely opposed to her. The manner in which Judith rested against the man by her was very distasteful. It offended Linda inexplicably; she wanted to draw into an infinity of distance from all contact with men and life.

She didn't even want to make one of those marriages that had nothing to do with love, but was only a sensible arrangement for the securing of gowns and velvet hangings and the luxury of enclosed automobiles. Suddenly she felt lonely, and hoped that her mother would come back soon.

XII

BUT when her mother, now Mrs. Moses Feldt, did return, Linda was conscious of a keen disappointment. Somehow she never actually came back. It wasn't only that, after so many years together, she occupied a room with another than Linda, but her manner was changed; it had lost all freedom of heart and speech. The new Mrs. Feldt was heavily polite to her husband's daughters; Linda saw that she liked Pansy, but Judith made her uncomfortable. She expressed this in an isolated return of the old confidences:

"That girl," she said sharply, "likes petting. She can talk all night about her soul and beauty, and play the piano till her fingers drop off, but I —I—know. You can't fool me where they are concerned. I can recognize an unhealthy sign. I never believed in going to all those concerts and kidding yourself into a fever. I may have shown myself a time, but you mark my word—I was honest compared to Judith Feldt. Don't you

be impressed with all her art talk and the books she reads. I was looking into one yesterday, and it made me blush; you can believe it or not, it takes some book for that!"

At the same time she treated Judith with a studious sweetness. Mr. Moses Feldt—Linda always thought of him as that—was a miracle of kindly cheerfulness. He made his wife and her daughter, and his own girls, an unbroken succession of elaborate and costly presents. "What's it for if not to spend on those you love?" he would remark, bringing a small jeweler's box wrapped in creamy-pink paper from his pocket. "You can't take it with you. I wasn't born with it—mama and I were as poor as any—you'll forgive me, Stella, I know, for speaking of her. I got enough heart to love you both. 'Oh, mama!' I said, and she dying, 'if you only won't go, I'll give you gold to eat.'"

Curiously, as Linda grew older, the consciousness of her stepfather as an absurd fat little man dwindled; she lost all sense of his actual person; and, as the influence of her mother slipped from her life, the mental conception of Mr. Moses Feldt deepened. She thought about him a great deal and very seriously; the things he said, the warm

impact of his being, vibrated in her memory. He had the effect on her of the music of Christopher Gluck—the effect of a pure fine chord.

Pansy she now thought of with a faint contempt: she was rapidly growing thick-waisted and heavy, and she was engaged to a dull young man not rich enough to be interesting. They sat about in frank embraces and indulged in a sentimental speech that united Judith and Linda in common oppression.

There were, not infrequently, gatherings of the Feldts at dinner, a noisy good-tempered uproar of a great many voices speaking at once; extraordinary quantities of superlative jewels and dresses of superfine textures; but the latter, Linda thought, were too vivid in pattern or color for the short full maternal figures they often adorned. But no one, it seemed, considered himself ageing or even, in spite of the most positive indications, aged. The wives with faded but fashionable hair and animated eyes in spent faces talked with vigorous raillery about the "boys," who, it might have happened, had gone in a small masculine company to a fervid musical show the evening before. While they, in their turn, thick like their brother or cousin Moses, with time-wasted

hair and countenances marked with the shrewdness in the service of which the greater part of their lives had vanished, had their little jokes about the "girls" and the younger and handsomer beaux who threatened their happiness.

At times the topic of business crept into the lighter discussion, and, in an instant, the gaiety evaporated and left expressionless men and quick sharp sentences steely with decision, or indirect and imperturbably blank. A memorandum book and a gold pencil would appear for an enigmatic note, after which the cheerfulness slowly revived.

The daughters resembled Judith or the slower placidity of Pansy; while there was still another sort, more vigorous in being, who consciously discussed riding academies, the bridle-paths of Central Park, and the international tennis. Their dress held a greater restraint than the elders; though Linda recognized that it was no less lavish; and their feminine trifles, the morocco beauty-cases and powder-boxes, the shoulder-pins, their slipper and garter buckles were extravagant in exquisite metals and workings.

They arrived in limousines with dove-colored upholstery and crystal vases of maidenhair fern and moss-roses; and often, in such a car, Linda

went to the theatre with Judith or Pansy and some cousins. Usually it was a matinée, where their seats were the best procurable, directly at the stage; and they sat in a sleek expensive row eating black chocolates from painted boxes ruffled in rose silk. The audience, composed mostly of their own world, followed the exotic fortunes of the plays with a complete discrimination in every possible emotional display and crisis.

Lithe actresses in a revealing severity of attire, like spoiled nuns with carmine lips, suffering in ingenuous problems of the passions, agonized in shuddering tones; or else they went to concerts to hear young violinists, slender, with intense faces and dramatic hair, play concertos that irritated Linda with little shivers of delight.

Sometimes they had lunch in a restaurant of Circassian walnut and velvet carpets, with cocktails, and eggs elaborate with truffles and French pastry. Then, afterward, they would stop at a confectioner's, or at a café where there was dancing, for tea. They all danced in a perfection of slow graceful abandon, with youths who, it seemed to Linda, did nothing else.

She accepted her part in this existence as in-

evitable, yet she was persistently aware of a feeling of strangeness, of essential difference from it. She was unable to lose a sense of looking on, as if morning, noon and night she were at another long play. Linda regarded it—as she did so much else—with neither enthusiasm nor marked annoyance. Probably it would continue without change through her entire life. All that was necessary, and easily obtained, was a sufficient amount of money.

Her manner, Pansy specially complained, was not intimate and inviting; in her room Linda usually closed the door; the frank community of the sisters was distasteful to her. She demanded an extraordinary amount of personal privacy. Linda never consulted Judith's opinion about her clothes, nor exchanged the more significant aspects of feeling. Alone in a bed-chamber furnished in silvery Hungarian ash, her bed a pale quilted luxury with Madeira linen crusted in monograms, without head or foot boards, and a dressing-table noticeably bare, she would deliberately and delicately prepare for the night.

While Judith's morning bath steamed with the softness and odor of lavender crystals, Linda

slipped into water almost cold. This, with her clear muslins and heavy black silk stockings, her narrow unornamented slippers, represented the perfection of niceness.

There were others than Pansy, however, who commented on what they called her superiority—the young men who appeared in the evening. A number of them, cousins of the Feldt dinner parties or more casual, tried to engage her sympathies in their persons and prospects. It was a society of early maturity. But, without apparent effort, she discouraged them, principally by her serene lack of interest. It was a fundamental part of her understanding of things that younger men were unprofitable; she liked far better the contemporaries of Moses Feldt.

Reynold Chase had ceased his visits, but his place had been taken by another and still another emotionally gifted man. The present one was dark and imperturbable: they knew little of him beyond the facts that he had been a long while in the Orient, that his manner and French were unsurpassed, and that practically every considerable creative talent in New York was entertained in his rooms.

Judith had been to one of his parties; and, the following morning in bed, she told Pansy and Linda the most remarkable things.

"It would never do for Pansy," she concluded; "but I must get Markue to ask you sometime, Linda. How old are you now? Well, that's practically sixteen, and you are very grown up. You would be quite sensational, in one of your plain white frocks, in his apartment. You'd have to promise not to tell your mother, though. She thinks I'm leading you astray now—the old dear. Does she think I am blind. I met a man last week, a friend of father's, who used to know her. Of course he wouldn't say anything, men are such idiots about that—like ostriches with their pasts buried and all the feathers sticking out—but there was a champagne expression in his smile."

Linda wondered, later, if she'd care to go to a party of Markue's. There was a great deal of drinking at such affairs; and though she rather liked cordials, crême de thé and Grand Marnier, even stronger things flavored with limes and an occasional frigid cocktail, she disliked—from a slight experience—men affected by drink. Judith had called her a constitutional prude;

this, she understood, was a term of reproach; and she wondered if, applied to her, it were just.

Usually it meant a religious person or one fussy about the edge of her skirt; neither of which she ever considered. She didn't like to sit in a corner and be hugged—even that she could now assert with a degree of knowledge—but it wasn't because she was shocked. Nothing, she told herself gravely, shocked her; only certain acts and moments annoyed her excessively. It was as if her mind were a crisp dress with ribbons which she hated to have mussed or disarranged.

Linda didn't take the trouble to explain this. Now that her mother had withdrawn from her into a perpetual and uncomfortable politeness she confided in no one. She would have been at a loss to put her complicated sensations and thoughts into words. Mr. Moses Feldt, the only one to whom she could possibly talk intimately, would be upset by her feelings. He would give her a hug and the next day bring up a new present from his pocket.

Her clothes, with the entire support of Lorice, were all delicate in fabric, mostly white with black sashes, and plainly ruffled. She detested

the gray crêpe de Chine from which Judith's undergarments were made and the colored embroidery of Pansy's; while she ignored scented toilet-waters and extracts. Markue, in finally asking her to a party at his rooms, said that there she would resemble an Athenian marble, of the unpainted epoch, in the ballet of Scheherazade.

XIII

"THERE'S nothing special to say about Markue's parties," Judith, dressing, told Linda. "You will simply have to take what comes your way. There is always some one serious at them, if you insis , as usual, on dignity." She stood slim and s ictive, like a perverse pierrot, before the oppressive depths of a black mirror. Linda had finished her preparations for the evening. There was no departure from her customary blanched exactness. She studied her reflection across udith's shoulder; her intense blue eyes, under the level blot of her bang, were grave on the delicate pallor of her face.

In the taxi, slipping rapidly down-town, Linda was conscious of a slight unusual disturbance of her indifference. This had nothing to do with whether or not she'd be a success; her own social demands were so small that any considerable recognition of her was unimportant. Her present feeling came from the fact that to-night, prac-

tically, she was making her first grown-up appearance in the world, the world from which she must select the materials of her happiness and success. To-night she would have an opportunity to put into being all that—no matter how firmly held—until now had been but convictions.

Her interest was not in whom or what she might meet, but in herself. Judith, smoking a cigarette in a mist of silver fox, was plainly excited. "I like Markue awfully," she admitted.

"Does he care for you?" Linda asked.

"That," said Judith, "I can't make out—if he likes me or if it's just anonymous woman. I wish it were the first, Linda." Her voice was shadowed; suddenly, in spite of her youth and exhilaration, she seemed haggard and spent. Linda recognized this in a cold scrutiny. Privately she decided that the other was a fool—she didn't watch her complexion at all.

The motor turned west in the low Forties and stopped before a high narrow stone façade with a massive griffon-guarded door. Judith led the way directly into the elevator and designated Markue's floor. It was at the top of the building, where he met them with his impenetrable courtesy and took them into a bare room evidently

planned for a studio. There were an empty easel, the high blank dusty expanse of the skylight, and chairs with the somber hats and coats of men and women's wraps like the glistening shed skins of brilliant snakes.

They turned through the hall to an interior more remarkable than anything Linda could have imagined; it seemed to her very high, without windows and peaked like a tent. Draperies of intricate Eastern color hung in long folds. There were no chairs, but low broad divans about the walls, a thick carpet with inlaid stands in the center laden with boxes of cigarettes, sugared exotic sweets and smoking incense. It was so dim and full of thick scent, the shut effect was so complete, that for a moment Linda felt painfully oppressed; it seemed impossible to breathe in the wavering bluish atmosphere.

Markue, who had appeared sufficiently familiar outside, now had a strange portentous air; the gleams of his quick black eyes, the dusky tone of his cheeks, his impassive grace, startled her. New York was utterly removed: the taxi that had brought Judith and her, the swirling traffic of Columbus Circle and smooth undulations of Fifth Avenue, were lost with a different life. She

saw, however, the open door to another room full of clear light, and her self-possession rapidly returned. Judith—as she had threatened—at once deserted her; and Linda found an inconspicuous corner of a divan.

There were, perhaps, twenty people in the two rooms, and each one engaged her attention. A coffee-colored woman was sitting beyond her, clad in loose red draperies to which were sewed shining patterns of what she thought was gold. Markue was introducing Judith, and the seated figure smiled pleasantly with a flash of beautiful teeth and the supple gesture of a raised brown palm. That, Linda decided, was the way she shook hands. Two dark-skinned men, one in conventional evening dress, were with her; they had small fine features and hair like carved ebony.

Linda had never before been at an affair with what she was forced to call colored people; instinctively she was antagonistic and superior. She turned to a solemn masculine presence with a ruffled shirt and high black stock; he was talking in a resonant voice and with dramatic gestures to a woman with a white face and low-drawn hair. Linda was fascinated by the latter, dressed in a soft clinging dull garnet. It

wasn't her clothes, although they were remarkable, that held her attention, but the woman's mouth. Apparently, it had no corners. Like a little band of crimson rubber, or a ring of vivid flame, it shifted and changed in the oddest shapes. It was an unhappy mouth, and made her think of pain; but perhaps not so much that as hunger . . . not for food, Linda was certain. What did she want?

There was a light appealing laugh from another seated on the floor in a floating black dinner dress with lovely ankles in delicate Spanish lace stockings; her head was thrown back for the whisper of a heavy man with ashen hair, a heavenly scarf and half-emptied glass.

Her bare shoulders, Linda saw, were as white as her own, as white but more sloping. The other's hair, though, was the loveliest red possible. The entire woman, relaxed and laughing in the perfumery and swimming shadows, was irresistible. A man with a huge nose and blank eyes, his hands disfigured with extraordinary rings, momentarily engaged her. Then, at the moment when she saw an inviting and correctly conventional youth, he crossed and sat at her side.

"Quite a show," he said in the manner she had expected and approved. The glow of his cigarette wavered over firmly cut lips. "We've just come to New York," he continued. "I don't know any one here but Markue, do you?" Linda explained her own limitations. "The Victory's fine and familiar."

She followed his gaze to where a winged statue with flying drapery was set on a stand. She had seen it before, but without interest. Now it held her attention. It wasn't a large cast, not over three feet high, but suddenly Linda thought that it was the biggest thing in the room; it seemed to expand as she watched it.

Beside the Victory, in a glass case with an enclosed concealed light, was a statue, greenish gray, a few inches tall, with a sneering placidity of expression as notable as the sweep of the other white fragment. "That's Chinese," her companion decided; "it looks as old as lust." There was the stir of new arrivals—a towering heavy man with a slight woman in emerald satin. "There's Pleydon, the sculptor," the youth told her animatedly. "I've seen him at the exhibitions. It must be Susanna Noda, the Russian singer, with him. He's a tremendous swell."

XIV

LINDA watched Pleydon as he met Markue in the middle of the room. He was dressed carelessly, improperly for the evening; but she forgave that as the result of indifference. The informal flannels and soft collar, too, suited the largeness of his being and gestures. There was a murmur of meeting, Susanna Noda smiled appealingly; and then, as Pleydon found a place on a divan, she at once contentedly sat on his lap. Watching her, Linda thought of a brilliant parrot; but that was only the effect of her color; for her face, with a tilted nose and wide golden eyes, generous warm lips, was charming. She lighted a cigarette, turned her graceful back on the room and company, and chatted in French to the composed sculptor.

Linda divined that he was the most impressive figure she had encountered; the quality of his indifference was beautiful and could only have come in the security of being a "tremendous swell." That phrase described all for which she

had cared most. It included everything that her mother had indicated as desirable and a lot that she, Linda, had added. Money, certainly, was an absolute necessity; but there were other things now that vaguely she desired. She tried to decide what they were.

Only the old inner confusion resulted, the emotion that might have been born in music; however, it was sharper than usual, and bred a new dissatisfaction with the easier accomplishments. Really it was very disturbing, for the pressure of her entire experience, all she had been told, could be exactly weighed and held. The term luxury, too, was revealing; it covered everything—except her present unformed longing.

There were still newcomers, and Linda was aware of a sudden constraint. A woman volubly French had appeared with a long pinkish-white dog in a blanket, and the three Arabians—she had learned that much—had risen with a concerted expression of surprise and displeasure. Their anxiety, though, was no more dramatic than that of the dog's proprietor. The gesture of her hands and lifted eyebrows were keenly expressive of her impatience with any one who couldn't accept, with her, her dog.

"Markue ought to have it out," some one murmured. "Dogs, to high caste Mohammedans, are unclean animals." Another added, "Worse than that, if it should touch them, they would have to make the pilgrimage to Mecca."

Without any knowledge of the situation of Mecca, Linda yet realized that it must be a very long journey to result from the mere touch of a dog. She didn't wonder at the restrained excitement of the "colored" people. The situation was reduced to a sub-acid argument between the Frenchwoman and the Begum; Madame couldn't exist without her *"p'tit."* The Oriental lady could not breathe a common air with the beast. The former managed a qualified triumph—the *"p'tit"* was caged with a chair in a corner, and the episode, for the moment, dropped.

Soon, however, Linda saw that the dog had wriggled out of captivity. It made a cautious progress to where the candy stood on a low stand and ran an appreciative tongue over the exposed sweet surfaces. Rapidly a sugared fig was snapped up. Linda held her breath; no one had noticed the animal yet—perhaps it would reach one of the objectors and she would have the thrill of witnessing the departure for Mecca.

But, as always, nothing so romantic occurred; the dog was discovered, and the Mohammedans, with a hurried politeness, made their salaams. Instead, a man with a quizzical scrutiny through glasses that made him resemble an owl, stopped before her.

" 'Here we go 'round the mulberry-bush,' " he chanted. "Hello, Kate Greenaway. Have you had a drink?"

"Yes, thank you," she replied sedately.

"Certified milk?"

"It was something with gin," she particularized, "and too sweet." He took the place beside her and solemnly recited a great many nursery rhymes. On the whole she liked him, deciding that he was very wicked. Soon he was holding her hand in both of his. "I know you're not real," he proceeded. "Verlaine wrote you—*'Les Ingenus'*:

" 'From which the sudden gleam of whiteness shed
Met in our eyes a frolic welcoming.'

"What if I'd kiss you?"

"Nothing," she returned coldly.

"You're remarkable!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "If you are not already one of the

celebrated beauties you're about to be. As cool as a fish! Look—Pleydon is going to rise and spill little Russia. Have you heard her sing Scriabine?" Linda ignored him in a sharp return of her interest in the big carelessly-dressed man. He put Susanna Noda aside and moved to the dim middle of the room. His features, Linda saw, were rugged and pronounced; he was very strong.

For a moment he stood gazing at the Winged Victory, his brow gathered into a frown, while he made a caressing gesture with his whole hand. Then he swung about and, from the heavy shadows of his face, he looked down at her. He was still for a disconcerting length of time, but through which Linda steadily met his interrogation. Then he bent over and seriously removed the man beside her.

"Adieu, Louis," he said.

The weight of Pleydon's body depressed the entire divan. "An ordinary man," he told her, "would ask how the devil you got here. Then he would take you to your home with some carefully chosen words for whatever parents you had. But I can see that all this is needless. You are an extremely immaculate person.

"That isn't necessarily admirable," he added.

"I don't believe I am admirable at all," Linda replied.

"How old are you?" he demanded abruptly.

She told him.

"Age doesn't exist for some women, they are eternal," he continued. "You see, I call you a woman, but you are not, and neither are you a child. You are Art—Art the deathless," his gaze strayed back to the Victory.

As she, too, looked at it, it seemed to Linda that the cast filled all the room with a swirl of great white wings and heroic robes. In an instant the incense and the dark colors, the uncertain pallid faces and bare shoulders, were swept away into a space through which she was dizzily borne. The illusion was so overpowering that involuntarily she caught at the heavy arm by her.

XV

"WHY did you do that?" he asked quickly, with a frowning regard. Linda replied easily and directly. "It seemed as if it were carrying me with it," she specified; "on and on and on, without ever stopping. I felt as if I were up among the stars." She paused, leaning forward, and gazed at the statue. Even now she was certain that she saw a slight flutter of its draperies. "It is beautiful, isn't it? I think it's the first thing I ever noticed like that. You know what I mean—the first thing that hadn't a real use."

"But it has," he returned. "Do you think it is nothing to be swept into heaven? I suppose by 'real' you mean oatmeal and scented soap. Women usually do. But no one, it appears, has any conception of the practical side of great art. You might try to remember that it is simply permanence given to beauty. It's like an amber in which beautiful and fragile things are kept for-

ever in a lovely glow. That is all, and it is enough.

"When I said that you were Art I didn't mean that you were skilfully painted and dressed, but that there was a quality in you which recalled all the charming women who had ever lived to draw men out of the mud—something, probably, of which you are entirely unconscious, and certainly beyond your control. You have it in a remarkable degree. It doesn't belong to husbands but to those who create 'Homer's children.'

"That's a dark saying of Plato's, and it means that the *Alcestis* is greater than any momentary offspring of the flesh."

Linda admitted seriously, "Of course, I don't understand, yet it seems quite familiar—"

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, repeat the old cant about reincarnation;" he interrupted, "and sitting together, smeared with antimony, on a roof of Babylon."

She hadn't intended to, she assured him. "Tell me about yourself," he directed. It was as natural to talk with him as it was, with others, to keep still. Her frank speech flowed on and on, supported by the realization of his attention.

"There really isn't much, besides hotels, all

different; but you'd be surprised how alike they were, too. I mean the things to eat, and the people. I never realized how tired I was of them until mother married Mr. Moses Feldt. The children were simply dreadful, the children and the women; the men weren't much better." She said this in a tone of surprise, and he nodded. "I can see now—I am supposed to be too old for my age, and it was the hotels. You learn a great deal."

"Do you like Mr. Moses Feldt?"

"Enormously; he is terribly sweet. I intend to marry a man just like him. Or, at least, he was the second kind I decided on: the first only had money, then I chose one with money who was kind, but now I don't know. It's very funny: kindness makes me impatient. I'm perfectly sure I'll never care for babies, they are so mussy. I don't read, and I can't stand being—well, loved.

"Mother went to a great many parties; every one liked her and she liked every one back; so it was easy for her. I used to long for the time when I'd wear a lovely cloak and go out in a little shut motor with a man with pearls; but now that's gone. They want to kiss you so much. I

wish that satisfied me. Why doesn't it? Is there anything the matter with me, do you think? I've been told that I haven't any heart."

As he laughed at her she noticed how absurdly small a cigarette seemed in his broad powerful hand. "What has happened to you is this," he explained: "a combination of special circumstances has helped you in every way to be what, individually, you were. As a rule, children are brought up in a house of lies, like taking a fine naked body and binding it into hideous rigid clothes. You escaped the damnation of cheap ready-cut morals and education. Your mother ought to have a superb monument—the perfect parent. Of course you haven't a 'heart.' From the standpoint of nature and society you're as depraved as possible. You are worse than any one else here—than all of them rolled together."

Curiously, she thought, this didn't disturb her, which proved at once that he was right. Linda regarded herself with interest as a supremely reprehensible person, perhaps a vampire. The latter, though, was a rather stout woman who, dressed in frightful lingerie, occupied couches with her arms caught about the neck of a man

bending over her. Every detail of this was distasteful.

What was she?

Her attention wandered to the squat Chinese god in the glass case. It was clear that he hadn't stirred for ages. A difficult thought partly formed in her mind—the Chinese was the god of this room, of Markue's party, of the women seated in the dim light on the floor and the divans; the low gurgle of their laughter, the dusky whiteness of their shoulders in the upcoiling incense, the smothered gleams of their hair, with the whispering men, were the world of the grayish-green image.

She explained this haltingly to Pleydon, who listened with a flattering interest. "I expect you're laughing at me inside," she ended impotently. "And the other, the Greek Victory," he added, "is the goddess of the other world, of the spirit. It's quaint a heathen woman should be that."

Linda discovered that she liked Pleydon enormously. She continued daringly that he might be the sort of man she wanted to marry. But he wouldn't be easy to manage; probably he could not be managed at all. Her mother had always

insisted upon the presence of that possibility in any candidate for matrimony. And, until now, Linda's philosophy had been in accord with her. But suddenly she entertained the idea of losing herself completely in—in love.

A struggle was set up within her: on one hand was everything that she had been, all her experience, all advice, and her innate detachment; on the other an obscure delicious thrill. Perhaps this was what she now wanted. Linda wondered if she could try it—just a little, let herself go experimentally. She glanced swiftly at Pleydon, and his bulk, his heavy features, the sullen mouth, appalled her.

Men usually filled her with an unaccountable shrinking into her remotest self. Pleydon was different; her liking for him had destroyed a large part of her reserve; but a surety of instinct told her that she couldn't experiment there. It was characteristic that a lesser challenge left her cold. She had better marry as she had planned.

Susanna Noda came up petulantly and sank in a brilliant graceful swirl at his feet. Her golden eyes, half shut, studied Linda intently.

XVI

"I AM fatigued," she complained; "you know how weary I get when you ignore me." He gazed down at her untouched. "I have left Lao-tze for Greece," he replied. She found this stupid and said so. "Has he been no more amusing than this?" she asked Linda. "But then, you are a child, it all intrigues you. You listen with the flattery of your blue eyes and mouth, both open."

"Don't be rude, Susanna," Pleydon commanded. "You are so feminine that you are foolish. I'm not the stupid one—look again at our 'child.' Tell me what you see."

"I see Siberia," she said finally. "I see the snow that seems so pure while it is as blank and cold as death. You are right, Dodge. I was the dull one. This girl will be immensely loved; perhaps by you. A calamity, I promise you. Men are pigs," she turned again to Linda; "no—imbeciles, for only idiots destroy the beauty that is given to them. They take your reputation

with a smile, they take your heart with iron fingers; your beauty they waste like a drunken Russian with gold."

"Susanna, like all spendthrifts, is amazed by poverty."

Even in the gloom Linda could see the pallor spreading over the other's face; she was glad that Susanna Noda spoke in Russian. However, with a violent effort, she subdued her bitterness. "Go into your Siberia!" she cried. "I always thought you were capable of the last folly of marriage. If you do it will spoil everything. You are not great, you know, not really great, not in the first rank. You've only the slightest chance of that, too much money. You were never in the gutter as I was—"

"Chateaubriand," he interrupted, "Dante, Velasquez."

"No, not spiritually!" she cried again. "What do you know of the inferno! Married, you will get fat." Pleydon turned lightly to Linda:

"As a supreme favor do not, when I ask you, marry me."

This, for Linda, was horribly embarrassing. However, she gravely promised. The Russian

lighted a cigarette; almost she was serene again. Linda said, "Fatness is awful, isn't it?"

Pleydon replied, "Death should be the penalty. If women aren't lovely—" he waved away every other consideration.

"And if men have fingers like carrots—" Susanna mimicked him. Judith, flushed, her hair loosened, approached. "Linda," she demanded, "do you remember when we ordered the taxi? Was it two or three?" Markue, at her shoulder, begged her not to consider home.

"I'm going almost immediately," Pleydon said, "and taking your Linda." His height and determined manner scattered all objections.

Linda, at the entrance to the apartment, found to her great surprise—in place of the motor she had expected—a small graceful single-horse victoria, the driver buttoned into a sealskin rug. Deep in furs, beside Pleydon, she was remarkably comfortable, and she was soothed by the rhythmic beat of the hoofs, the even progress through the crystal night of Fifth Avenue.

Her companion flooded his being with the frozen air. They had, it seemed, lost all desire to talk. The memory of Markue's party lingered like the last vanishing odor of his incense; there

was a confused vision of the murmurous room against the lighted exterior where the drinks sparkled on a table. Linda made up her mind that she would not go to another. Then she wondered if she'd see Pleydon again. The Russian singer had been too silly for words.

It suddenly occurred to her that the man now with her had taken Susanna Noda, and that he had left her planted. He had preferred driving her, Linda Condon, home. He wasn't very enthusiastic about it, though; his face was gloomy.

"The truth is," he remarked at last, "that Susanna is right—I am not in the first rank. But that was all nonsense about the necessity of the gutter—sentimental lies."

Linda was not interested in this, but it left her free to explore her own emotions. The night had been eventful because it had shaken all the foundation of what she intended. That single momentary delicious thrill had been enough to threaten the entire rest. At the same time her native contempt of the other women, of Judith with her tumbled hair, persisted. Was there no other way to capture such happiness? Was it all hopelessly messy with drinks and unpleasant familiarity?

What did Pleydon mean by spirit? Surely there must be more kinds of love than one—he had intimated that. She gathered that "Homer's children," those airs of Gluck that she liked so well, were works of art, sculpture, such as he did. Yet she had never thought of them as important, important as oatmeal or delicate soap. She made up her mind to ask him about it, when she saw that they had reached the Eighties; she was almost home.

"I am going away to-morrow," he told her, "for the winter, to South America. When I come back we'll see each other. If you should change address send me a line to the Harvard Club." The carriage had stopped before the great arched entrance to the apartment-house, towering in its entire block. He got out and lifted her to the pavement as if she had been no more than a flower in his hands. Then he walked with her into the darkness of the garden.

The fountains were cased in boards; the hedged borders, the bushes and grass, were dead. High above them on the dark wall a window was bright. Linda's heart began to pound loudly, she was trembling . . . from the cold. There was a faint sound in the air—the elevated trains,

or stirring wings? It was nothing, then, to be lifted into heaven. There was the door to the hall and elevator. She turned, to thank Dodge Pleydon for all his goodness to her, when he lifted her—was it toward heaven?—and kissed her mouth.

She was still in his arms, with her eyes closed. "Linda Condon?" he said, in a tone of inquiry.

At the same breath in which she realized a kiss was of no importance a sharp icy pain cut at her heart. It hurt her so that she gasped. Then, and this was strange, she realized that—as a kiss—it hadn't annoyed her. Suddenly she felt that it wasn't just that, but something far more, a part of all her inner longing. He had put her down and was looking away, a face in shadow with an ugly protruding lip.

She saw him that way in her dreams—in the court under the massive somber walls, with a troubled frown over his eyes. It seemed to her that, reaching up, she smoothed it away as they stood together in a darkness with the fountains, the hedges, dead, the world with never a sound sleeping in the prison of winter.

XVII

LINDA thought about Dodge Pleydon on a warm evening of the following May. At four o'clock, in a hotel, Pansy had been married; and the entire Feldt connection had risen to a greater height of clamorous cheer than ever before. Extravagant unseasonable dishes, wines and banked flowers were lavishly mingled with sentimental speeches, healths and tears. Linda had been acutely restless, impatient of all the loud good humor and stupid compliments. The sense of her isolation from their life was unbearably keen. She would have a very different wedding with a man in no particular like Pansy's.

After dinner—an occasion, with Pansy absent, where Mr. Moses Feldt's tears persisted in flowing—she had strayed into the formal chamber across from the dining-room and leaned out of a window, gazing into the darkening court. Directly below was where Pleydon had kissed her. She often re-examined her feelings about that; but only to find that they had dissolved into an

indefinite sense of the inevitable. Not alone had it failed to shock her—she hadn't even been surprised. Linda thought still further about kissing, with the discovery that if, while it was happening, she was conscious of the kiss, it was a failure; successful, it carried her as far as possible from the actuality.

Pleydon, of course, had not written to her; he had intimated nothing to the contrary, only asking her to let him know, at the Harvard Club, if she changed address. That wasn't necessary, and now, probably, he was back from South America. Where, except by accident, might she see him? Markue, with his parties, had dropped from Judith's world, his place taken by a serious older dealer in Dutch masters with an impressive gallery just off Fifth Avenue.

That she would see him Linda was convinced; this feeling absorbed any desire; it was no good wanting it or not wanting it; consequently she was undisturbed. She considered him gravely and in detail. Had there been any more Susanna Nodas in his stay south? She had heard somewhere that the women of Argentine were irresistible. Her life had taught her nothing if not the fact that a number of women figured

in every man's history. It was deplorable but couldn't be avoided; and whether or not it continued after marriage depended on the cunning of any wife.

Now, however, Linda felt weary already at the prospect of a married life that rested on the constant play of her ingenuity. A great many things that, but a little before, she had willingly accepted, seemed to her probably not less necessary but distinctly tiresome. Linda began to think that she couldn't really bother; the results weren't sufficiently important.

Dodge Pleydon.

She slept in a composed order until the sun was well up. It was warmer than yesterday; and, going to an afternoon concert with Judith, she decided to walk. Linda strolled, in a short severe jacket and skirt, a black straw hat turned back with a cockade and a crisp flushed mass of sweet peas at her waist. The occasion, as it sometimes happened, found her in no mood for music. The warmth of the sunlight, the open city windows and beginning sounds of summer, had enveloped her in a mood in which the jangling sentimentality of a street organ was more potent than the legato of banked violins.

She was relieved when the concert was over, but lingered at her seat until the crowd had surged by; it made Linda furious to be shoved or indiscriminately touched. Judith had gone ahead, when Linda was conscious of the scrutiny of a pale well-dressed woman of middle age. It became evident that the other was debating whether or not to speak; clearly such an action was distasteful to her; and Linda had turned away before a restrained voice addressed her:

"You will have to forgive me if I ask your name . . . because of a certain resemblance. Seeing you I—I couldn't let you go."

"Linda Condon," she replied.

The elder, Linda saw, grew even paler. She put out a gloved hand. "Then I was right," she said in a slightly unsteady voice. "But perhaps, when I explain, you will think it even stranger, inexcusable. My dear child, I am your father's sister."

Linda was invaded by a surprise equally made up of interest and resentment. The first was her own and the second largely borrowed from her mother. Besides, why had her father's family never made the slightest effort to see her.

This evidently had simultaneously occurred to the other.

"Of course," she added, quite properly, "we can't undertake family questions here. I shouldn't blame you a bit, either, if you went directly away. I had to speak, to risk that, because you were so unmistakably a Lowrie. It is not a common appearance. We—I—" she floundered for a painful moment; then she gathered herself with a considerable dignity. "Seeing you has affected me tremendously, changed everything. I have nothing to say in our defense, you must understand that. I am certain, too, that my sister will feel the same—we live together in Philadelphia. I hope you will give me your address and let us write to you. Elouise will join with me absolutely."

Linda told her evenly where she lived, and then allowed Miss Lowrie to precede her toward the entrance. She said nothing of this to Judith, nor, momentarily, to her mother. She wanted to consider it undisturbed by a flood of talk and blame. It was evident to her that the Lowries had behaved very badly, but just how she couldn't make out. She recalled her father's sister—her

aunt—minutely, forced to the realization that she was a person of entire superiority. Here, she suddenly saw, had been the cause of all their difficulties—the Lowries hadn't approved of the marriage, they had objected to her mother.

Five years ago she would have been incensed at this; but now, essentially, she was without personal indignation. She wanted, for herself, to discover as much as possible about her father and his family. A need independent of maternal influences stirred her. Linda was reassured by the fact that her father had been gently born; while she realized that she had always taken this for granted. Her mother must know nothing about the meeting with Miss Lowrie until the latter had written.

That was Friday and the letter came the following Tuesday. Linda, alone at the breakfast-table, instantly aware of the source of the square envelope addressed in a delicate regular writing, opened it and read in an unusual mental disturbance:

"My dear Linda,

I hope you will not consider it peculiar for me to call you this, for nothing else seems possible. Meeting you in that abrupt manner upset me, as you must have noticed. Of course I knew of you, and even now I can not go into

our long unhappy affair, but until I saw you, and so remarkably like the Lowries, I did not realize how wicked Elouise and I had been. But I am obliged to add only where you were concerned. We have no desire to be ambiguous in that.

However, I am writing to say that we should love to have you visit us here. It is possible under the circumstances that your mother will not wish you to come. Yet I know the Lowries, a very independent and decided family, and although it is my last intention to be the cause of difficulty with your mother, still I hope it may be arranged.

In closing I must add how happy I was at the evidence of your blood. But that, I now see, was a certainty. You will have to forgive us for a large measure of blindness. Affectionately,

AMELIA VIGNÉ LOWRIE."

Almost instantaneously Linda was aware that she would visit the Lowries. She liked the letter extremely, as well as all that she remembered of its sender. At the same time she prepared for a scene with her mother, different from those of the past—with the recourse to the brandy flask—but no less unpleasant. They had very little to say to each other now; and, when she went into her mother's room with an evident definite purpose, the latter showed a constrained surprise, a palpable annoyance that her daughter had found her at the daily renovation of her worn face.

XVIII

LINDA said directly, "I met Miss Lowrie, father's sister, at a concert last week, and this morning I had a letter asking me to stay with them in Philadelphia."

Mrs. Feldt's face suddenly had no need for the color she held poised on a cloth. Her voice, sharp at the beginning, rose to a shrill unrestrained wrath.

"I wonder at the brass of her speaking to you at all let alone writing here. Just you give me the letter and I'll shut her up. The idea! I hope you were cool to her, the way they treated us. Stay with them—I guess not!"

"But I thought of going," Linda replied. "It's only natural. After all, you must see that he was my father."

"A pretty father he was, too good for the girl he married. It's my fault I didn't tell you long ago, but I just couldn't abide the mention of him. He deserted me, no, us, cold, without a word—walked out of the door one noon, taking his hat

as quiet as natural, and never came back. I never saw him again nor heard except through lawyers. That was the kind of heart he had, and his sisters are worse. I hadn't a decent speech of any kind out of them. The Lowries," she managed to inject a surprising amount of contempt into her pronouncement of that name. "What it was all about you nor any sensible person would never believe:

"The house smelled a little of boiled cabbage. That's why he left me, and you expected in a matter of a few months. He said in his dam' frigid way that it had become quite impossible and took down his hat."

"There must have been more," Linda protested, suppressing a mad desire to laugh.

"Not an inch," her mother asserted. "Nothing, after a little, suited him. He'd sit up like a poker, just as I've seen you, with his lips tight together in the Lowrie manner. It didn't please him no matter what you'd do. He wouldn't blow out at you like a Christian and I never knew where I was at. I'd come down in a matinée, the prettiest I could buy, and then see he didn't like it. He would expect you to be dressed in the morning like it was afternoon and you going

out. And as for loosening your corsets for a little comfort about the house, you might as well have slapped him direct.

"That wasn't the worst, though; but his going away without as much as a flicker of his hand; and with me like I was. Nobody on earth but would blame him for that. I only got what was allowed me after we had changed back to my old name, me and you. He never asked one single question about you nor tried to see or serve you a scrap. For all he knew, at a place called Santa Margharita in Italy, you might have been born dead."

She was unable, Linda recognized, to defend him in any way; he had acted frightfully. She acknowledged this logically with her power of reason, but somehow it didn't touch her as it had her mother, and as, evidently, the latter expected. She was absorbed in the vision of her father sitting, in the Lowrie manner, rigid as a poker; she saw him quietly take up his hat and go away forever. Linda understood his process completely; she was capable of doing precisely the same thing. Whatever was the matter with her—in the heartlessness so often laid to her account—had been equally true of her father.

"You ought to know what to say to them," Mrs. Moses Feldt cried, "or I'll do it for you! If only I had seen her she would have heard a thing or two not easy forgotten."

Linda's determination to go to Philadelphia had not been shaken, and she made a vain effort to explain her attitude. "Of course, it was horrid for you," she said. "I can understand how you'd never never forgive him. But I am different, and, I expect, not at all nice. It's very possible, since he was my father, that we are alike. I wish you had told me this before—it explains so much and would have made things easier for me. I am afraid I must see them."

She was aware of the bitterness and enmity that stiffened her mother into an unaccustomed adequate scorn:

"I might have expected nothing better of you, and me watching it coming all these years. You can go or stay. I had my life in spite of the both of you, as gay as I pleased and a good husband just the same. I don't care if I never see you again, and if it wasn't for the fuss it would make I'd take care I didn't. You'll have your father's money now I'm married; I wonder you stay around here at all with your airs of being better

than the rest. God's truth is you ain't near as good, even if I did bring you into the world."

"I am willing to agree with you," Linda answered. "No one could be sweeter than the Feldts. I sha'n't do nearly as well. But that isn't it, really. People don't choose themselves; I'm certain father didn't at that lonely Italian place. If you weren't happy laced in the morning it wasn't your fault. You see, I am trying to excuse myself, and that isn't any good, either."

"Unnatural," Mrs. Moses Feldt pronounced. And Linda, weary and depressed, allowed her the last word.

XIX

NOTHING further during the subsequent brief exchange of notes between Miss Lowrie and Linda was said of the latter's intention to visit her father's family. Mrs. Feldt, however, whose attitude toward Linda had been negatively polite, now displayed an animosity carefully hidden from her husband but evident to the two girls. The elder never neglected an opportunity to emphasize Linda's selfishness or make her personality seem ridiculous. But this Linda ignored from her wide sense of the inconsequence of most things.

Yet she was relieved when, finally, she had actually left New York. She looked forward with an unusual hopeful curiosity to the Lowries. To her surprise their house—miles, it appeared, from the center of the city—was directly on a paved street with electric cars, unpretentious stores and very humble dwellings nearby. Back from the thoroughfare, however, there were spacious green lawns. The street itself, she saw at once,

was old—a highway of gray stone with low aged stone façades, steep eaves and blackened chimney-pots reaching, dusty with years, into the farther hilly country.

A gable of the Lowrie house, with a dignified white door, a fanlight of faintly iridescent glass and polished brasses, faced the brick sidewalk, while to the left there was a high board fence and an entrance with a small grille open on a somber reach of garden. A maid in a stiff white cap answered the fall of the knocker; she took Linda's bag; and, in a hall that impressed her by its bareness, Linda was greeted by the Miss Lowrie she had seen.

Her aunt was composed, but there was a perceptible flush on her cheeks, and she said in a rapid voice, after a conventional welcome, "You must meet Elouise at once, before you go up to your room."

Elouise Lowrie was older than Amelia, but she, too, was slender and erect, with black hair startling in its density on her wasted countenance. Linda noticed a fine ruby on a crooked finger and beautiful rose point lace. "It was good of you," the elder proceeded, "to come and see two old women. I don't know whether we have more to

say or to keep still about. But I, for one, am going to avoid explanations. You are here, a fool could see that you were Bartram's girl, and that is enough for a Lowrie."

The room was nearly as bare as the hall: in place of the deep carpets of the Feldts' the floor, of dark uneven oak boards, was merely waxed and covered by a rough-looking oval rug. The walls were paneled in white, with white ruffled curtains at small windows; and the furniture, the dull mahogany ranged against the immaculate paint, the rocking-chairs of high slatted walnut and rush bottoms, the slender formality of tables with fluted legs, was dignified but austere. There were some portraits in heavy old gilt—men with florid faces and tied hair, and the delicate replicas of high-breasted women in brocades.

There was, plainly, an air of the exceptional in Amelia Lowrie's conduction of Linda to her room. She waited at the door while the other moved forward to the center of a chamber empty of all the luxury Linda had grown to demand. There was a bed with tall graceful posts supporting a canopy like a frosting of sugar, a solemn set of drawers with a diminutive framed mirror in which she could barely see her shoulders, a

small unenclosed brass clock with long exposed weights, and two uninviting painted wooden chairs. This was not, although very nearly, all. Linda's attention was attracted by a framed and long-faded photograph of a young man, bareheaded, with a loosely knotted scarf, a striped blazer and white flannels. His face was thin and sensitive, his lips level, and his eyes gazed with a steady questioning at the observer.

"That was Bartram," Amelia Lowrie told her; "your father. This was his room."

She went down almost immediately and left Linda, in a maze of dim emotions, seated on one of the uncomfortable painted chairs. Her father! This was his room; nothing, she realized, had been disturbed. The mirror had held the vaguely unsteady reflection of his face; he had slept under the arched canopy of the bed. She rose and went to a window from which he, too, had looked.

Below her was the garden shut in on its front by the high fence. There was a magnolia-tree, now covered with thick smooth white flowers, and, at the back, low-massed rhododendron with fragile lavender blossoms on a dark glossy foliage. But the space was mainly green and shadowed

in tone; while beyond were other gardens, other emerald lawns and magnolia-trees, an ordered succession of tranquillity with separate brick or stone or white dwellings in the lengthening afternoon shadows of vivid maples.

It was as different as possible from all that Linda had known, from the elaborate hotels and gigantic apartment houses, the tropical interiors, of her New York life. She unpacked her bag, putting her gold toilet things on the chest of drawers, precisely arranging in a shallow closet what clothes she had brought, and then, changing, went down to the Lowries.

They surveyed her with eminent approval at a dinner-table lighted only with candles, beside long windows open on a dusk with a glimmer of fireflies. Suddenly Linda felt amazingly at ease; it seemed to her that she had sat here before, with the night flowing gently in over the candle-flames. The conversation, she discovered, never strayed far from the concerns and importance of the Lowrie blood. "My grandmother, Natalie Vigné," Elouise informed her, "came with her father to Philadelphia from France, in eighteen hundred and one, at the invitation of Stephen Girard, who was French as

well. She married Hallet Lowrie whose mother was a Bartram.

"That, my dear, explains our black hair and good figgers. There never was a lumpy Lowrie. Well, Hallet built this house, or rather enlarged it, for his wife; and it has never been out of the family. Our nephew, Arnaud Hallet—Arnaud was old Vigné's name—owns it now. Isaac Hallet, you may recall, was suspected of being a Tory; at any rate his brother's descendants, Fanny Rodwell is the only one left, won't speak."

The placid conversation ran on unchanged throughout dinner and the evening. Linda was relieved by the absence of any questioning; indeed nothing contemporary, she realized, was held to be significant. "I thought Arnaud would be in to-night," Elouise Lowrie said; "he knew Linda was expected." No one, however, appeared; and Linda went up early to her room. There, too, were only candles, a pale wavering illumination in which the past, her father, were extraordinarily nearby. A sense of pride was communicated to her by so much that time had been unable to shake. The bed was steeped in the magic of serene traditions.

XX

ARNAUD HALLET appeared for dinner the evening after Linda's arrival; a quiet man with his youth lost, slightly stooped shoulders, crumpled shoes and a green cloth bag. But he had a memorable voice and an easy distinction of manner; in addition to these she discovered, at the table, a lighter amusing sense of the absurd. She watched him—as he poured the sherry from a decanter with a silver label hung on a chain—with a feeling of mild approbation. On the whole he was nice but uninteresting. What a different man from Pleydon!

The days passed in a pleasant deliberation, with Arnaud Hallet constantly about the house or garden, while Linda's thoughts continually returned to the sculptor. He was clearer than the actuality of her mother and the Feldts or the recreated image of her father. At times she was thrilled by the familiar obscure sense of music, of longing slowly translated into happiness.

Then more actual problems would envelop her in doubt. Mostly she was confused—in her cool material necessity for understanding—by the temper of her feeling for Dodge Pleydon. Linda wondered if this were love. Perhaps, when she saw him again, she'd be able to decide. Then she remembered promising to let him know if she changed her address. It was possible that already he had called at the Feldts', or written, and that her mother had refused to inform him where she had gone.

Linda had been at the Lowries' two weeks now, but they were acutely distressed when she suggested that her visit was unreasonably prolonged. "My dear," they protested together, "we hoped you'd stay the summer. Bartram's girl! Unless, of course, it is dull with us. Something brighter must be arranged. No doubt we have only thought of our own pleasure in having you."

Linda replied honestly that she enjoyed being with them extremely. Her mother's dislike, the heavy luxury of the Feldt apartment, held little attraction for her. Then, too, losing the sense of the bareness of the house Hallet Lowrie had built for his French wife, she began to find it surprisingly appealing.

Her mind returned to her promise to Pleydon. She told herself that probably he had forgotten her existence, but she had a strong unreasoning conviction that this was not so. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to write him and, almost before she was aware of the intention, she had put "Dear Mr. Pleydon" at the head of a sheet of note-paper.

I promised to let you know in the spring when you came back from South America where I was. I did not think I would have to do it, but here I am in Philadelphia with my father's sisters. I do not know just how long for, but a month anyhow. It is very quiet, but charming. I have the room that was my father's when he was young, and look out of the window like he must have. If you should come to Philadelphia my aunts ask me to say that they would be glad to have you for dinner. This is how you get here. . . .

Very sincerely,

LINDA CONDON.

She walked to a street crossing, where she dropped the envelope into a letter-box on a lamp-post, and returned to find Arnaud Hallet waiting for her. He said:

"Everyone agrees I'm serious, but actually you are worse than the Assembly." They went

through the dining-room to the garden, and sat on the stone step of a deep window. It was quite late, perhaps eleven o'clock, and the fireflies, slowly rising into the night, had vanished. Linda was cool and remote and grave, silently repeating and weighing the phrases of her letter to Pleydon.

She realized that Arnaud Hallet was coming to like her a very great deal; but she gave this only the slightest attention. She liked him, really, and that dismissed him from serious consideration. Anyhow, in spite of the perfection of his manner, Arnaud's careless dress displeased her: his shoes and the shoulders of his coat were perpetually dusty, and his hair, growing scant, was always ruffled. Linda understood that he was highly intellectual, and frequently contributed historical and genealogical papers to societies and bulletins, but compared with Dodge Pleydon's brilliant personality and reputation, Pleydon surrounded by the Susanna Nodas of life, Arnaud was as dingy as his shoes.

She wondered idly when the latter would actually try to love her. He was holding her hand and it might well be to-night. Linda decided that he would do it delicately; and when, almost

immediately, he kissed her, she was undisturbed. No, surprisingly, it had been quite pleasant. He hadn't mussed her ribbons, nor her spirit, a particle. In addition he did not at once become impossible and urgently sentimental; there was even a shade of amusement on his heavy face.

"You appear to take a lot for granted," he complained.

"I'd been wondering when it would happen," she admitted coolly.

"It always does, then?"

"Usually I stop it," she continued. "I don't believe I'll ever like being kissed. Can you tell me why? No one ever has; they all think they can bring me around to it."

"And to them," he added.

"But they end by being furious at me. I've been sworn at and called dreadful names. Sometimes they're only silly. One cried; I hated that the most."

"Do you mean that you were sorry for him?"

"Oh, dear, no. Why should I be? He looked so odious all smeared with tears."

Arnaud Hallet returned promptly: "Linda, you're a little beast." To counteract his rude speech he kissed her again. "This," he said with

less security, "threatens to become a habit. I thought, at forty-five, that I was safely by the island of sirens, but I'll be on the rocks before I know it."

She laughed with the cool remoteness of running water.

"I wonder you haven't been murdered," he proceeded, "in a moonless garden by an elderly lawyer. Do you ever think of the lyric day when, preceded by a flock of bridesmaids and other flowery pagan truck, you'll meet justice?"

"Marriage?" she asked. "But of course. I have everything perfectly planned—"

"Then, my dear Linda, describe him."

"Very straight," she said, "with beautiful polished shoes and brushed hair."

"You ought to have no trouble finding that. Any number of my friends have one—to open the door and take your things. I might arrange a very satisfactory introduction for everybody concerned—a steady man well on his way to preside over the pantry and table."

"You're not as funny as usual," Linda decided critically. "That, too, disturbs me," he replied. "It looks even more unpromising for the near future."

XXI

IN her room Linda thought, momentarily, of Arnaud Hallet; whatever might have been serious in her attitude toward him dissolved by the lightness of his speech. Dodge Pleydon appealed irresistibly to her deepest feelings. Now her mental confusion was at least clear in that she knew what troubled her. It was not new, it extended even to times before Pleydon had entered her life—the difficulties presented by the term "love."

In her mind it was divided into two or three widely different aspects, phases which she was unable to reconcile. Her mother, in the beginning, had informed her that love was a nuisance. To be happy, a man must love you without any corresponding return; this was necessary to his complete management, the securing of the greatest possible amount of new clothes. It was as far as love should be allowed to enter marriage. But that reality, with a complete expression in shopping, was distant from the immaterial and

delicate emotions that in her responded to Pleydon.

Linda had been familiar with the materials, the processes, of what, she had been assured, was veritable love since early childhood. Her mother's dressing, the irritable hours of fittings and at her mirror, the paint she put on her cheeks, the crimping of her hair were for the favor of men. These struggles had absorbed the elder, all the women Linda had encountered, to the exclusion of everything else. This, it seemed, must, from its overwhelming predominance, be the greatest thing in life.

There was nothing mysterious about it. You did certain things intelligently, if you had the figure to do them with, for a practical end. The latter, carefully controlled, like an essence of which a drop was delightful and more positively stifling, was as real as the methods of approach. Oatmeal or scented soap! The force of example and association combined to bathe such developments in the sanest light possible, and Linda had every intention of the successful grasping of an easy and necessary luxury. She had, until—vaguely—now, been entirely willing to accept the unescapable conditions of love used as a means

or the element of pleasure at parties. Now, however, the unexpected element of Dodge Pleydon disturbed her philosophy.

Suddenly all the lacing and painting and crimping, the pretense and lies and carefully planned accidental effects, filled her with revolt. The insinuations of women, the bareness of their revelations, her mother returning unsteady and mussed from a dinner, were unutterably disgusting. Even to think of them hurt her fundamentally: so much of what she was, of what she had determined, had been destroyed by an emotion apparently as slight as echoed music.

Here was the real mystery and for which nothing in her experience had prepared her. She began to see why it was called a nuisance—if this were love—and wondered if she had better not suppress it at once. It wouldn't be suppressed. Her thoughts continually came back to Pleydon, and the warmth, the disturbing thrill, always resulted. It led her away from herself, from Linda Condon; a sufficiently strange accomplishment. A concern for Dodge Pleydon, little schemes for his happiness and well-being, put aside her clothes and complexion and her future.

Until the present her acts had been the result

of deliberation. She had been impressed by the necessity for planning with care; but, in the cool gloom of the covered bed, a sharp joy held her at the possibility of flinging caution away. Yet she couldn't quite, no matter how much she desired it, lose herself. Linda was glad that Pleydon was rich; and there were, she remembered, moments for surrender.

As usual these problems, multiplying toward night, were fewer in the bright flood of morning. She laughed at the memory of Arnaud Hallet's humor; and then, it was late afternoon, the maid told her that Pleydon was in the drawing room. Her appearance satisfactory she was able to see him at once. To her great pleasure neither Pleydon nor his clothes had changed. He was dressed in light-gray flannels; a big easy man with a crushing palm, large features and an expression of intolerance.

"Linda," he said, "what a splendid place to find you. So much better than Markue's." He was, she realized, very glad to see her, and dropped at once, as if they had been uninterruptedly together, into intimate talk. "My work has been going badly," he proceeded; "or rather not at all. I made a rather decent fountain at

Newport; but—remember what Susanna said?—it's not in the first rank. A happy balance and strong enough conception; yet it is like a Cellini ewer done in granite. The truth is, too much interests me; an artist ought to be the victim of a monomania. I'm a normal animal." He studied her contentedly:

"How lovely you are. I came over—in an automobile at last—because I was certain you couldn't exist as I remembered you. But you could and do. Lovely Linda! And what a gem of a letter. It might have been copied from 'The Perfect Correspondent for Young Females.' You're not going to lose me again. When I was a little boy I had a passion for sherbets."

She smiled at him with half-closed eyes and the conviction that, with Pleydon, she could easily be different. He leaned forward and his voice startled her with the impression that he had read her mind:

"If you could care for any one a lifetime would be short to get you. Look, you have never been out of my thoughts—or within my reach. It seems a myth that I kissed you; impossible . . . Linda."

"But you did," she told him, gaining happi-

ness from the mere assurance. They were alone in the drawing-room, and he rose, sweeping her up into his arms. Yet the expected joy evaded her desire and the sudden determination to lose utterly her reserve. It was evident that he as well was conscious of this, for he released her and stood frowning, his protruding lower lip uglier than ever.

"A lifetime would be nothing," he said again; "or it might be everything wasted. Which are you—all soul and spirit, or none?"

"I don't know," she replied, in her bitter disappointment, her heart pinched by the sharpest pain she remembered. There was the stir of skirts at the door; Linda turned with a sense of relief to Amelia Lowrie. However, dinner progressed very well indeed. "Then your aunt," Elouise said to Pleydon, "was Carrie Dodge. I recall her perfectly." That established, the Lowrie women talked with a gracious freedom, exploring the furthermost infiltrations of blood and marriages.

Linda was again serene. She watched Pleydon with an extraordinary formless conviction—each of them was a part of the other's life; while in some way marriage and love were now hope-

lessly confused. It was beyond effort or planning. That was all she could grasp, but she was contented. Sometimes when he talked he made the familiar descriptive gesture with his hand, as if he were shaping the form of his speech: a sculptor's gesture, Linda realized.

Later they wandered into the garden, a dark enclosure with the long ivy-covered façade of the house broken by the lighted spaces of windows. Beyond the fence at regular intervals an electric car passed with an increasing and diminishing clangor. The white petals of the magnolia-tree had fallen and been wheeled away; the blossoms of the rhododendron were dead on their stems. It was, Linda felt, a very old garden that had known many momentary emotions and lives.

Dodge Pleydon, standing before her, put his hands on her shoulders. "Would I have any success?" he asked. "Do you think you'd care for me?"

She smiled confidently up at his intent face. "Oh, yes." Yet she hoped that he would not kiss her—just then. The delicacy of her longing and need were far removed from material expressions. This, of course, meant marriage; but marriage was money, comfort, the cold thing her

mother had impressed on her. Love, her love, was a mistake here. But in a little it would all come straight and she would understand. She no longer had confidence in her mother's wisdom.

In spite of her shrinking, of a half articulate appeal, he crushed her against his face. Whatever that had filled her with hope, she thought, was being torn from her. A sickening aversion over which she had no control made her stark in his arms. The memories of the painted coarse satiety of women and the sly hard men for which they schemed, the loose discussions of calculated advances and sordid surrenders, flooded her with a loathing for what she passionately needed to be beautiful.

Yet deep within her, surprising in its vitality, a fragile ardor persisted. If she could explain, not only might he understand, but be able to make her own longing clear and secure. But all she managed to say was, "If you kiss me again I think it will kill me." Even that failed to stop him. "You were never alive," he asserted. "I'll put some feeling into you. It has been done before with marble."

Linda, unresponsive, suffered inordinately.

Again on her feet she saw that Pleydon was

angry, his face grim. He seemed changed, threatening and unfamiliar; it was exactly as if, in place of Dodge Pleydon, a secretive impersonal ugliness stood disclosed before her. He said harshly:

"When will you marry me?"

It was what, above all else, she had wanted; and Linda realized that to marry him was still the crown of whatever happiness she could imagine. But her horror of the past recreated by his beating down of her gossamer-like aspiration, the vision of him flushed and ruthless, an image of indiscriminate nameless man, made it impossible for her to reply. An abandon of shrinking fear numbed her heart and lips.

"You won't get rid of me as you do the others about you," he continued. "This time you made a mistake. I haven't any pride that you can insult; but I have all that you—with your character—require. I have more money even than you can want." She cried despairingly:

"It isn't that now! I had forgotten everything to do with money and depended on you to take me away from it always."

"When will you marry me?"

In a flash of blinding perception, leaving her

as dazed as though it had been a physical actuality, she realized that marrying him had become an impossibility. At the barest thought of it the dread again closed about her like ice. She tried, with all the force of old valuations, with even an effort to summon back the vanquished thrill, to give herself to him. But a quality overpowering and instinctive, the response of her incalculable injury, made any contact with him hateful. It was utterly beyond her power to explain. A greater mystery still partly unfolded—whatever she had hoped from Pleydon belonged to the special emotion that had possessed her since earliest childhood.

In the immediate tragedy of her helplessness, with Dodge Pleydon impatient for an assurance, she paused involuntarily to wonder about that hidden imperative sense. There was a broken mental fantasy of—of a leopard bearing a woman in shining hair. This was succeeded by a bright thrust of happiness and, all about her, a surging like the imagined beat of the wings of the Victory in Markue's room. Almost Pleydon had explained everything, almost he was everything; and then the other, putting him aside, had

swept her back into the misery of doubt and loneliness.

"I can't marry you," she said in a flat and dragged voice. He demanded abruptly:

"Why not?"

"I don't know." She recognized his utter right to the temper that mastered him. For a moment Linda thought Pleydon would shake her. "You feel that way now," he declared; "and perhaps next month; but you will change; in the end I'll have you."

"No," she told him, with a certainty from a source outside her consciousness. "It has been spoiled."

He replied, "Time will discover which of us is right. I'm almost willing to stay away till you send for me. But that would only make you more stubborn. What a strong little devil you are, Linda. I have no doubt I'd do better to marry a human being. Then I think we both forget how young you are—you can't pretend to be definite yet."

He captured her hands; too exhausted for any resentment or feeling she made no effort to evade him. "I'll never say good-bye to you."

His voice had the absolute quality of her own conviction. To her amazement her cheeks were suddenly wet with tears. "I want to go now," she said unsteadily; "and—and thank you."

His old easy formality returned as he made his departure. In reply to Pleydon's demand she told him listlessly that she would be here for, perhaps, a week longer. Then he'd see her, he continued, in New York, at the Feldts'.

In her room all emotion faded. Pleydon had said that she was still young; but she was sure she could never, in experience or feeling, be older. She became sorry for herself; or rather for the illusions, the Linda, of a few hours ago. She examined her features in the limited uncertain mirror—strong sensations, she knew, were a charge on the appearance—but she was unable to find any difference in her regular pallor. Then, mechanically conducting her careful preparations for the night, her propitiation of the only omnipotence she knew, she put out the candles of her May.

XXII

WHAT welcome Linda met in New York came from Mr. Moses Feldt, who embraced her warmly enough, but with an air slightly ill at ease. He begged her to kiss her mama, who was sometimes hurt by Linda's coldness. She made no reply, and found the same influence and evidence of the power of suggestion in Judith. "We thought maybe you wouldn't care to come back here," the latter said pointedly, over her shoulder, while she was directing the packing of a trunk. The Feldts were preparing for their summer stay at the sea.

Her mother's room resembled one of the sales of obvious and expensive attire conducted in the lower salons of pleasure hotels. There were airy piles of chiffon and satin, inappropriate hats and the inevitable confections of silk and lace. "It's not necessary to ask if you were right at home with your father's family," Mrs. Condon observed with an assumed casual inattention. "I can see you sitting with those old women as dry

and false as any. No one saved me in the clacking, I'm sure."

"We didn't speak of you," Linda replied. She studied, unsparing, the loose flesh of the elder's ravaged countenance. Her mother, she recognized, hated her, both because she was like Bartram Lowrie and still young, with everything unspent that the other valued and had lost. In support of herself Mrs. Feldt asserted again that she had "lived," with stacks of friends and flowers, lavish parties and devoted attendance.

"You may be smarter than I was," she went on, "but what good it does you who can say? And if you expect to get something for nothing you're fooled before you start." She shook out the airy breadths of a vivid echo of past daring. "From the way you act a person might think you were pretty, but you are too thin and pulled out. I've heard your looks called peculiar, and that was, in a manner of speaking, polite. You're not even stylish any more—the line is full again and not suitable for bony shoulders and no bust." She still cherished a complacency in her amplitude.

Linda turned away unmoved. Of all the world, she thought, only Dodge Pleydon had the

power actually to hurt her. She knew that she would see him soon again and that again he would ask her to marry him. She considered, momentarily, the possibility of saying yes; and instantly the dread born with him in the Lowrie garden swept over her. Linda told herself that he was the only man for whom she could ever deeply care; that—for every conceivable reason—such a marriage was perfect. But the shrinking from its implications grew too painful for support.

Her mother's bitterness increased hourly; she no longer hid her feelings from her husband and Judith; and dinner, accompanied by her elaborate sarcasm, was a difficult period in which, plainly, Mr. Moses Feldt suffered most and Linda was the least concerned. This condition, she admitted silently, couldn't go on indefinitely; it was too vulgar if for no other reason. And she determined to ask the Lowries for another and more extended invitation.

Pleydon came, as she had expected, and they sat in the small reception-room with the high ceiling and dark velvet hangings, the piano at which, long ago it now seemed, Judith had played the airs of Gluck for her. He said little, but remained for a long while spread over the divan

and watching her—in a formal chair—discontentedly. He rose suddenly and stood above her, a domineering bulk obliterating nearly everything else. In response to his demand she said, pale and composed, that she was not "reasonable"; she omitted the "yet" included in his question. Pleydon frowned. However, then, he insisted no further.

When he had gone Linda was as spent as though there had been a fresh brutal scene; and the following day she was enveloped in an unrelieved depression. Her mother mocked her silence as another evidence of ridiculous pretentiousness. Mr. Moses Feldt regarded her with a furtive concerned kindliness; while Judith followed her with countless small irritating complaints. It was the last day at the apartment before their departure for the summer. Linda was insuperably tired. She had gone to her room almost directly after dinner, and when a maid came to her door with a card, she exclaimed, before looking at it, that she was not in. It was, however, Arnaud Hallet; and, with a surprise tempered by a faint interest, she told the servant that she would see him.

There was, Linda observed at once, absolutely no difference in Arnaud's clothing, no effort to make himself presentable for New York or her. In a way, it amused her—it was so characteristic of his forgetfulness, and it made him seem doubly familiar. He waved a hand toward the luxury of the interior. "This," he declared, "is downright impressive, and lifted, I'm sure, out of a novel of Ouida's.

"You will remember," he continued, "complaining about my sense of humor one evening; and that, at the time, I warned you it might grow worse. It has. I am afraid, where you are concerned, that it has absolutely vanished. My dear, you'll recognize this as a proposal. I thought my mind was made up, after forty, not to marry; and I specially tried not to bring you into it. You were too young, I felt. I doubted if I could make you happy, and did everything possible, exhausted all the arguments, but it was no good.

"Linda, dear, I adore you."

She was glad, without the slightest answering emotion, that Arnaud, well—liked her. At the same time all her wisdom declared that she

couldn't marry him; and, with the unsparing frankness of youth and her individual detachment, she told him exactly why.

"I need a great deal of money," she proceeded, "because I am frightfully extravagant. All I have is expensive; I hate cheap things—even what satisfies most rich girls. Why, just my satin slippers cost hundreds of dollars and I'll pay unlimited amounts for a little fulling of lace or some rare flowers. You'd call it wicked, but I can't help it—it's me.

"I've always intended to marry a man with a hundred thousand dollars a year. Of course, that's a lot—do you hate me for telling you?—but I wouldn't think of any one with less than fifty—"

Arnaud Hallet interrupted quietly, "I have that."

Linda gazed incredulously at his neglected shoes, the wrinkles of his inconsiderable coat and unstudied scarf. She saw that, actually, he had spoken apologetically of his possessions; and a stinging shame spread through her at the possibility that she had seemed common to an infinitely finer delicacy than hers.

XXIII

MOST of these circumstances Linda Hallet quietly recalled sitting with her husband in the house that had been occupied by the Lowries'. A letter from Pleydon had taken her into a past seven years gone by; while ordinarily her memory was indistinct; ordinarily she was fully occupied by the difficulties, or rather compromises, of the present. But, in the tranquil open glow of a Franklin stove and the withdrawn intentness of Arnaud reading, her mind had returned to the distressed period of her wedding.

Elouise Lowrie—Amelia was dead—sunk in a stupor of extreme old age, her bloodless hands folded in an irreproachable black surah silk lap, sat beyond the stove; and Lowrie, Linda's elder child, five and a half, together with his sister Vigné, had been long asleep above. Linda was privately relieved by this: her children presented enormous obligations. The boy, already at a model school, appalled her inadequate prepara-

tions by his flashes of perceptive intelligence; while she was frankly abashed at the delicate rosy perfection of her daughter.

The present letter was the third she had received from Dodge Pleydon, whom she had not seen since her marriage. At first he had been enraged at the wrong, he had every reason to feel, she had done him. Then his anger had dissolved into a meager correspondence of outward and obvious facts. There was so much that she had been unable to explain. He had always been impatient, even contemptuous, of the emotion that made her surrender to him unthinkable —Linda realized now that it had been the strongest impulse of her life—and, of course, she had never accounted for the practically unbalanced enmity of her mother.

The latter had deepened to an incredible degree, so much so that Mr. Moses Feldt, though he had never taken an actual part in it—such bitterness was entirely outside his generous sentimentality—had become acutely uncomfortable in his own home, imploring Linda, with ready tears, to be kinder to her mama. Judith, too, had grown cutting, jealous of Linda's serenity of youth, as her appearance showed the effect of her

wasting emotions. Things quite extraordinary had happened: once Linda's skin had been almost seriously affected by an irritation that immediately followed the trace of her powder-puff; and at several times she had had clumsily composed anonymous notes of a most distressing nature.

She had wondered, calmly enough, which of the two bitter women were responsible, and decided that it was her mother. At this the situation at the Feldts', increasingly strained, had become an impossibility. Arnaud Hallet, after his first visit, had soon returned. There was no more mention of his money; but every time he saw her he asked her again, in his special manner—a formality flavored by a slight diffident humor—to marry him. Arnaud's proposals had alternated with Pleydon's utterly different demand.

Linda remembered agonized evenings when, in a return of his brutal manner of the unforgettable night in the Lowrie garden, he tried to force a recognition of his passion. It had left her cold, exhausted, the victim of a mingled disappointment at her failure to respond with a hatred of all essential existence. At last, on a particularly trying occasion, she had desperately agreed to marry him.

The aversion of her mother, becoming really dangerous, had finally appalled her; and a headache weighed on her with a leaden pain. Dodge, too, had been unusually considerate; he talked about the future—tied up, he asserted, in her—of his work; and suddenly, at the signal of her rare tears, Linda agreed to a wedding.

In the middle of the night she had wakened oppressed by a dread resulting in an uncontrollable chill. She thought first that her mother was bending a malignant face over her; and then realized that her feeling was caused by her promise to Dodge Pleydon. It had grown worse instead of vanishing, waves of nameless shrinking swept over her; and in the morning, further harrowed by the actualities of being, she had sent a telegram to Arnaud Hallet—to Arnaud's kindness and affection, his detachment not unlike her own.

They were married immediately; and through the ceremony and the succeeding days she had been almost entirely absorbed in a sensation of escape. At the death of Amelia Lowrie, soon after, Arnaud had suggested a temporary period in the house she remembered with pleasure; and, making small alterations with the

months and years, they had tacitly agreed to remain.

Linda often wondered, walking about the lower floor, why it seemed so familiar to her: she would stand in the dining-room, with its ceiling of darkened beams, and gaze absent-minded through the long windows at the close-cut walled greenery without. The formal drawing-room, at the right of the street entrance, equally held her—a cool interior with slatted wooden blinds, a white mantelpiece with delicately reeded supports and a bas-relief of Minerva on the center panel, a polished brass scuttle for cannel-coal and chairs with wide severely fretted backs upholstered in old pale damask.

The house seemed familiar, but she could never grow accustomed to the undeniable facts of her husband, the children and her completely changed atmosphere. She admitted to herself that her principal feeling in connection with Lowrie and Vigné was embarrassment. Here she always condemned herself as an indifferent, perhaps unnatural, mother. She couldn't help it. In the same sense she must be an unsatisfactory wife. Linda was unable to shake off the con-

viction that it was like a play in which she had no more than a spectator's part.

This was her old disability, the result of her habit of sitting, as a child, apart from the concerns and stir of living. She made every possible effort to overcome it, to surrender to her new conditions; but, if nothing else, an instinctive shyness prevented. It went back further, even, she thought, than her own experience, and she recalled all she had heard and reconstructed of her father—a man shut in on himself who had, one day, without a word walked out of the door and left his wife, never to return. These realizations, however, did little to clarify her vision; she was continually trying to adjust her being to circumstances that persistently remained a little distant and blurred.

In appearance, anyhow, Linda told herself with a measure of reassurance, she was practically unchanged. She still, with the support of Arnaud, disregarding current fashion, wore her hair in a straight bang across her brow and blue gaze. She was as slender as formerly, but more gracefully round, in spite of the faint characteristic stiffness that was the result of her mental hesitation. Her clothes, too, had hardly varied—

she wore, whenever possible, white lawns ruffled about the throat and hem, with broad soft black sashes, while her more formal dresses were sheaths of dull unornamented satin extravagant in the perfection of their simplicity.

XXIV

ARNAUD HALLET stirred, sharply closing his book. He had changed—except for a palpable settling down of grayness—as little as Linda. For a while she had tried to bring about an improvement in his appearance, and he had met her expressed wish whenever he remembered it; but this was not often. In the morning a servant polished his shoes, brushed and ironed his suits; yet by evening, somehow, he managed to look as though he hadn't been attended to for days. She would have liked him to change for dinner; other men of his connection did, it was a part of his inheritance. Arnaud, however, in his slight scoffing disparagement, declined individually to annoy himself. He was, she learned, enormously absorbed in his historical studies and papers.

"Did you enjoy it?" she asked politely of his reading. "Extremely," he replied. "The American Impressions of Tyrone Power, the English actor, through eighteen thirty-three and four.

His account of a European packet with its hand-bells and Saratoga water and breakfast of spitch-cock is inimitable. I'd like to have sat at Cato's then, with a julep or hail-storm, and watched the trotting races."

Elouise Lowrie rose unsteadily, confused with dozing; but almost immediately she gathered herself into a relentless propriety and a formal good-night.

"What has been running through that mysterious mind of yours?"

"I had a letter from Dodge," she told him simply; "and I was thinking a little about the past." He exhibited the nice unstrained interest of his admirable personality. "Is he still in France?" he queried. "Pleydon should be a strong man; I am sure we are both conscious of a little disappointment in him." She said: "I'll read you his letter, it's on the table.

" 'You will see, my dear Linda, that I have not moved from the Rue de Penthièvre, although I have given up the place at Etretat, and I am not going to renew the lease here. Rodin insists, and I coming to agree with him, that I ought to be in America. But the serious attitude here toward art, how impossible that word has been made, is charming. And you will be glad to know that I have

had some success in the French good opinion. A marble, Cotton Mather, that I cut from the stone, has been bought for the Luxembourg.

" 'I can hear you both exclaim at the subject, but it is very representative of me now. I am tired of mythological naiads in a constant state of pursuit. Get Hallet to tell you something about Mather. What a somber flame! I have a part Puritan ancestry, as any Lowrie will inform you. Well, I shall be back in a few months, very serious, and a politician—a sculptor has to be that if he means to land any public monuments in America.

" 'I hope to see you.' "

The letter ended abruptly, with the signature, "Pleydon."

"Are you happy, Linda?" Arnaud Hallet asked unexpectedly after a short silence. So abruptly interrogated she was unable to respond. "What I mean is," he explained, "do you think you would have been happier married to him? I knew, certainly, that it was the closest possible thing between us." Now, however, she was able to satisfy him:

"I couldn't marry Dodge."

"Is it possible to tell me why?"

"He hurt me very much once. I tried to marry him, I tried to forget it, but it was useless. I was dreadfully unhappy, in a great many ways—"

"So you sent for me," he put in as she paused reflectively. "I didn't hurt you, at any rate." It seemed to her that his tone was shadowed. "You have never hurt me, Arnaud," she assured him, conscious of the inadequacy of her words. "You were everything I wanted."

"Except for my hats," he said in a brief flash of his saving humor. "It would be better for me, perhaps, if I could hurt you. That ability comes dangerously close to a constant of love. You mustn't think I am complaining. I haven't the slightest reason in the face of your devastating honesty. I didn't distress you and I had the necessary minimum—the fifty thousand." His manner was so even, so devoid of sting, that she could smile at the expression of her material ambitions. "I realize exactly your feeling for myself, but what puzzles me is your attitude toward the children."

"I don't understand it either," she admitted, "except that I am quite afraid of them. They are so different from all my own childhood; often they are too much for me. Then I dread the time when they will discover how stupid and uneducated I am at bottom. I'm sure you already ask questions before them to amuse yourself at

my doubt. What shall I do, Arnaud, when they are really at school and bring home their books?"

"Retreat behind your dignity as a parent," he advised. "They are certain to display their knowledge and ask you to bound things or name the capital of Louisiana." She cried, "Oh, but I know that, it's New Orleans!" She saw at once, from his entertained expression, that she was wrong again, and became conscious of a faint flush of annoyance. "It will be even worse," she continued, "when Vigné looks to me for advice; I mean when she is older and has lovers."

"She won't seriously; they never do. She'll tell you when it's all over. Lowrie will depend more on you. I may have my fun about the capital of Louisiana, Linda, but I have the greatest confidence in your wisdom. God knows what an unhappy experience your childhood was, but it has given you a superb worldly balance."

"I suppose you're saying that I am cold," she told him. "It must be true, because it is repeated by every one. Yet, at times, I used to be very different—you'd never imagine what a romantic thrill or strange ideas were inside of me. Like a memory of a deep woods, and—and the loveliest adventure. Often I would hear music as

clearly as possible, and it made me want I don't know what terrifically."

"An early experience," he replied. Suddenly she saw that he was tired, his face was lined and dejected. "You read too much," Linda declared. He said: "But only out of the printed book." She wondered vainly what he meant. As he stood before the glimmering coals, in the room saturated in repose, she wished that she might give him more; she wanted to spend herself in a riot of feeling on Arnaud and their children. What a detestable character she had! Her desire, her efforts, were wasted.

He went about putting up the windows and closing the outside shutters, a confirmed habit. Linda rose with her invariable sense of separation, the feeling that, bound on a journey with a hidden destination, she was only temporarily in a place of little importance. It was like being always in her hat and jacket. Arnaud shook down the grate; then he gazed over the room; it was all, she was sure, as it had been a century ago, as it should be—all except herself.

XXV

YET her marriage had realized in almost every particular what she had—so much younger—planned. The early suggestion, becoming through constant reiteration a part of her knowledge, had been followed and accomplished; and, as well, her later needs were served. Linda told herself that, in a world where a very great deal was muddled, she had been unusually fortunate. And this made her angry at her pervading lack of interest in whatever she had obtained.

Other women, she observed, obviously less fortunate than she, were volubly and warmly absorbed in any number of engagements and pleasures; she continually heard them, Arnaud's connections—the whole superior society, eternally and vigorously discussing servants and bridge, family and cotillions, indiscretions and charities. These seemed enough for them; their lives were filled, satisfied, extraordinarily busy. Linda, for the most part, had but little to do.

Her servants, managed with remote exactness, gave no trouble; she had an excellent woman for the children; her dress presented no new points of anxiety nor departure . . . she was, in short, Arnaud admitted, perfectly efficient. She disposed of such details mechanically, almost impatiently, and was contemptuous, no envious, of the women whose demands they contented.

At the dinners, the balls, to which Arnaud's sense of obligation both to family and her took them against his inclination, it was the same—everyone, it appeared to Linda, was flushed with an intentness she could not share. Men, she found, some of them extremely pleasant, still made adroit and reassuring efforts for her favor; the air here, she discovered, was even freer than the bravado of her earlier surroundings. This love-making didn't disturb her—it was, ultimately, the men who were fretted—indeed, she had rather hoped that it would bring her the relief she lacked.

But again the observations and speculation of her mature childhood, what she had heard revealed in the most skillful feminine dissections, had cleared her understanding to a point that made the advances of hopeful men quite enter-

tainingly obvious. Their method was appallingly similar and monotonous. She liked, rather than not, the younger ones, whose confidence that their passion was something new on earth at times refreshed her; but the navigated materialism of greater experience finally became distasteful. She discussed this sharply with Arnaud:

"You simply can't help believing that most women are complete idiots."

"You haven't said much more for men."

"The whole thing is too silly! Why is it, Arnaud? It ought to be impressive and sweep you off your feet, up—"

"Instead of merely behind some rented palms," he added. "But I must say, Linda, that you are not a very highly qualified judge of sentiment." He pronounced this equably, but she was conscious of the presence of an injury in his voice. She was a little weary at being eternally condemned for what she couldn't help. Any failure was as much Arnaud Hallet's as hers; he had had his opportunity, all that for which he had implored her. Her thoughts returned to Dodge Pleydon. April was well advanced, and he had written that he'd be back and see them in the spring. Linda listened to her heart but it was

unhastened by a beat. She would be very glad to have him at hand, in her life again, of course.

Then the direction of her mind veered—what did he still think of her? Probably he had altogether recovered from his love for her. It had been a warm day, and Arnaud had opened a window; but now she was aware of a cold air on her shoulder and she asked him abruptly to lower the sash. Linda remembered, with a lingering sense of triumph, the Susanna Noda whom Dodge had left at a party for her. There had been a great many Susannas in his life; the reason for this was the absence of any overwhelming single influence. It might be that now—he had written of the change in the subjects of his work—such a guide had come into his existence. She hoped she had. Yet, in view of the announced silliness of women, she didn't want him to be cheaply deluded.

He was an extremely human man.

But she, Linda, it seemed, was an inhuman woman. The days ran into weeks that added another month to spring; a June advanced sultry with heat; and, suddenly as usual, a maid at the door of her room announced Pleydon. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, she had to dress,

and she sent him a message that he mustn't expect her in a hurry. She paused in her deliberate preparations for a long thoughtful gaze into a mirror; there was not yet a shadow on her face, the trace of a line at her eyes. The sharp smooth turning and absolute whiteness of her bare shoulders were flawless.

At first it appeared to Linda that he, too, had not changed. They were in the library opening into the dining-room, a space shut against the sun by the Venetian blinds, and faintly scented by a bowl of early tea roses. He appeared the same—large and informally clad in gray flannels, with aggressive features and sensitive strong hands. He was quiet but plainly happy to be with her again and sat leaning forward on his knees, watching her intently as she chose a seat.

Then it slowly dawned on her that he had changed, yes—tragically. Pleydon, in every way, was years older. His voice, less arbitrary, had new depths of questioning, his mouth was more repressed, his face notably sparer of flesh. He was immediately aware of the result of her scrutiny. "I have been working like a fool," he explained. "A breath of sickness, too, four

years ago in Soochow. One of the damnable Asiatic fevers that a European is supposed to be immune from. You are a miracle, Linda. How long has it been—nearly eight years; you have two children and Arnaud Hallet and yet you are the girl I met at Markue's. I wanted to see you different, just a little, a trace of something that should have happened to you. It hasn't. You're the most remarkable mother alive."

"If I am," she returned, "it is not as a success, or at least for me. Lowrie and Vigné are healthy, and happy enough; but I can't lose myself in them, Dodge; I can't lose myself at all."

He was quiet at this, the smoke of his cigarette climbing bluely in a space with the aqueous stillness of a lake's depths. "The same," he went on after a long pause; "nothing has touched you. I ought to be relieved but, do you know, it frightens me. You are relentless. You have no right, at the same time, to be beautiful. I have seen a great many celebrated women at their best moments, but you are lovelier than any. It isn't a simple affair of proportion and features—I wish I could hold it in a phrase, the turn of a chisel. I can't. It's deathless romance in a bang cut blackly across heavenly

blue." He was silent again, and Linda glad that he still found her attractive. She discovered that the misery his presence once caused her had entirely vanished, its place taken by an eager interest in his affairs, a lightness of spirit at the realization that, while his love for her might have grown calm, no other woman possessed it.

XXVI

AT the dinner-table she listened—cool and fresh, Arnaud complained, in spite of the heat—to the talk of the two men. By her side Elouise Lowrie occasionally repeated, in a voice like the faint jangle of an old thin piano, the facts of a family connection or a commendation of the Dodges. Arnaud really knew a surprising lot, and his conversation with Pleydon was strung with terms completely unintelligible to her. It developed, finally, into an argument over the treatment of the acanthus motive in rococo ornament. France was summoned against Spain; the architectural degrading of Italy deplored. . . . It amazed her that any one could remember so much.

Linda without a conscious reason suddenly stopped the investigation of her feeling for Pleydon. Even in the privacy of her thoughts an added obscurity kept her from the customary clear reasoning. After dinner, out in the close gloom of the garden, she watched the flicker of the cigarettes. There was thunder, so distant

and vague that for a long while Linda thought she was deceived. She had a keen rushing sensation of the strangeness of her situation here—Linda Hallet. The night was like a dream from which she would stir, sigh, to find herself back again in the past waiting for the return of her mother from one of her late parties.

But it was Arnaud who moved and, accompanying Elouise Lowrie, went into the house for his interminable reading. Pleydon's voice began in a low remembering tone:

"What a fantastic place the Feldt apartment was, with that smothered room where you said you would marry me. You must have got hold of Hallet in the devil of a hurry. I've often tried to understand what happened; why, all the time, you were upset—why, why, why?"

"In a way it was because a ridiculous hairdresser burned out some of my mother's front wave," she explained.

"Of course," he replied derisively, "nothing could be plainer."

She agreed calmly. "It was very plain. If you want me to try to tell you don't interrupt. It isn't a happy memory, and I am only doing it because I was so rotten to you.

"Yes, I can see now that it was the hairdresser and a hundred other things exactly the same. My mother, all the women we knew, did nothing but lace and paint and frizzle for men. I used to think it was a game they played and wonder where the fun was. There were even hints about that and later they particularized and it made me as sick as possible. The men, too, were odious; mostly fat and bald; and after a while, when they pinched or kissed me, I wanted to die.

"That was all I knew about love, I had never heard of any other—men away from their families for what they called a good time and women plotting and planning to give it to them or not give it to them. Then mother, after her looks were spoiled, married Mr. Moses Feldt, and I met Judith, who only existed for men and men's rooms and told me worse things, I'm sure, than mother ever dreamed; and, on top of that, I met you and you kissed me.

"But it was different from any other; it didn't shock me, and it brought back a thrill I have always had. I wanted, then, to love you, and have you ask me to marry you, more than anything else in the world. I was sure, if you would only be patient, that I could change what had

hurt me into a beautiful feeling. I couldn't tell you because I didn't understand myself." She stopped, and Pleydon repeated, bitterly and slow:

"Fat old bald men; and I was one with them destroying your exquisite hope." She heard the creak of the basket chair as he leaned forward, his face masked in darkness. "Perhaps you think I haven't paid.

"You will never know what love is unless I can manage somehow to make you understand how much I love you. Hallet will have to endure your hearing it. This doesn't belong to him; it has not touched the earth. Every one, more or less, talks about love; but not one in a thousand, not one in a million, has such an experience. If they did it would tear the world into shreds. It would tear them as it has me. I realize the other, the common thing—who experimented more! This has nothing to do with it. A boy lost in the idealism of his first worship has a faint reflection. Listen:

"I can always, with a wish, see you standing before me. You yourself—the folds of your sash, the sharp narrow print of your slippers on the pavement or the matting or the rug, the ruffles

about your hands. I have the feeling of you near me with your breathing disturbing the delicacy of your breast. There is the odor and shimmer of your hair . . . your lips move . . . but without a sound.

"This vision is more real than reality, than an opera-house full of people or the Place Vendôme; and it, you, is all I care for, all I think about, all I want. I find quiet places and stay there for hours, with you; or, if that isn't possible, I turn into a blind man, a dead man warm again at the bare thought of your face. Listen:

"I've been in shining heaven with you. I have been melted to nothing and made over again, in you, good. We have been walking together in a new world with rapture instead of air to breathe. A slow walk through dark trees—God knows why—like pines. And every time I think of you it is exactly as though I could never die, as though you had burned all the corruption out of me and I was made of silver fire. And listen:

"Nothing else is of any importance, now or afterward, you are now and the hereafter. I see people and people and hear words and words, and I forget them the moment they have gone, the second they are still. But I haven't lost an in-

flection of your voice. When I work in clay or stone I model and cut you into every surface and fold. I see you looking back at me out of marble and bronze. And here, in this garden, you tried to give me more—"

The infinitely removed thunder was like the continued echo of his voice. There was a stirring of the leaves above her head; and the light that had shone against the house in Elouise Lowrie's window was suddenly extinguished. All that she felt was weariness and a confused dejection, the weight of an insuperable disappointment. She could say nothing. Words, even Pleydon's, seemed to her vain. The solid fact of Arnaud, of what Dodge, more than seven years before, had robbed her, put everything else aside, crushed it.

She realized that she would never get from life what supremely repaid the suffering of other women, made up for them the failure of practically every vision. She was sorry for herself, yes, and for Dodge Pleydon. Yet he had his figures in metal and stone; his sense of the importance of his work had increased enormously; and, well, there were Lowrie and Vigné; it would be difficult, every one agreed, to find better or

handsomer children. But they seemed no more than shadows or colored mist. This terrified her —what a hopelessly deficient woman she must be! But even in the profundity of her depression the old vibration of nameless joy reached her heart.

XXVII

IN the morning there was a telegram from Judith Feldt, saying that her mother was dangerously sick, and she had lunch on the train for New York. The apartment seemed stuffy; there was a trace of dinginess, neglect, about the black velvet rugs and hangings. Her mother, she found, had pneumonia; there was practically no chance of her recovering. Linda sat for a short while by the elder's bed, intent upon a totally strange woman, darkly flushed and ravished in an agonizing difficulty of breathing. Linda had a remembered vision of her gold-haired and gay in floating chiffons, and suddenly life seemed shockingly brief. A serious-visaged clergyman entered the room as she left and she heard the rich soothing murmur of a confident phrase.

The Stella Condon who had become Mrs. Moses Feldt had had little time for the support of the church; although Linda recalled that she had uniformly spoken well of its offices. To

condemn Christianity, she had asserted, was to invite bad luck. She treated this in exactly the way she regarded walking under ladders or spilling salt or putting on a stocking wrong. Linda, however, had disregarded these possibilities of disaster and, with them, religion.

A great many people, she noticed, talked at length about it; women in their best wraps and with expensive little prayer books left the hotels for various Sunday morning services, and ministers came in later for tea. All this, she understood, was in preparation for heaven, where everybody, who was not in hell, was to be forever the same and yet radiantly different. It seemed very vague and far away to Linda, and, since there was such a number of immediate problems for her to consider, she had easily ignored the future. When now, with her mother dying, it was thrust most uncomfortably before her.

She half remembered sentences, admonitions, of the godly—a woman had once told her that dancing and low gowns were hateful in the sight of God, some one else that playing-cards were an instrument of the devil. Pleasure, she had gathered, was considered wrong, and she instinctively

put these opinions, together with a great deal else, aside as envious.

That expressed her whole experience. She had never keenly associated the thought of death with herself before, and she was unutterably revolted by the impending destruction of her fine body, the delicate care of which formed her main preoccupation in life. Age was supremely distasteful, but this other . . . she shuddered.

Linda wanted desperately to preserve the whiteness of her skin, the flexible black distinction of her hair, yes—her beauty. Here, again, with other women the vicarious immortality of children would be sufficient. But not for her. She was in the room that had been hers before marriage, with her infinite preparations for the night at an end; and, her hair loose across the blanched severity of her attire, her delicately full arms bare, she clasped her cold hands in stabbing apprehension.

She would do anything, anything, to escape that repulsive fatality to her lavished care. It was only to be accomplished by being good; and goodness was in the charge of the minister. She saw clearly and at once her difficulty—how could

she go to a solemn man in a clerical vest and admit that she was solely concerned by the impending loss of her beauty. The promised splendor of heaven, in itself, failed to move her—it threatened to be monotonous; and she was honest in her recognition that charity, the ugliness of poverty, repelled her. Linda was certain that she could never change in these particulars; she could only pretend.

A surprising multiplication of such pretense occurred to her in people regarded as impressively religious. She had seen men like that—she vaguely thought of the name Jasper—going off with her mother in cabs to dinners that must have been "godless." She wondered if this mere attitude, the public show, were enough. And an instinctive response told her that it was not. If all she had been informed about the future were true she decided that her mother's chance was no worse than that of any false display of virtue.

She, Linda, could do nothing.

The funeral ceremony with its set form—so inappropriate to her mother's qualities—was even more remote from Linda's sympathies than was common in her encounters. But Mr. Moses

Feldt's grief appeared to her actual and affecting. He invested every one with the purity of his own spirit.

She left New York at the first possible moment with the feeling that she was definitely older. The realization, she discovered, happened in that way—ordinarily giving the flight of time no consideration it was brought back to her at intervals of varying length. As she aged they would grow shorter.

The result of this experience was an added sense of failure; she tried more than ever to overcome her indifference, get a greater happiness from her surroundings and activity. Linda cultivated an attention to Lowrie and Vigné. They responded charmingly but her shyness with them persisted in the face of her inalienable right to their full possession. She insisted, too, on going about vigorously in spite of Arnaud's humorous groans and protests. She forced herself to talk more to the men attracted to her, and assumed, with disconcerting ease, an air of sympathetic interest. But, unfortunately, this brought on her a rapid increase of the love-making that she found so fatiguing.

She studied her husband thoughtfully through

the evenings at home, before the Franklin stove, or, in summer, in the secluded garden. Absolutely nothing was wrong with him; he had, after several deaths, inherited even more money; and, in his deprecating manner where it was concerned, devoted it to her wishes. Except for books, and the clothes she was forced to remind him to get, he had no personal expenses. In addition to the money he never offended her, his relationships and manner were conducted with an inborn nice formality that preserved her highest self-opinion.

Yet she was never able to escape from the limitations of a calm admiration; she couldn't lose herself, disregard herself in a flood of generous emotion. When, desperately, she tried, he, too, was perceptibly ill at ease. Usually he was undisturbed, but once, when she stood beside him with her coffee cup at dinner, he disastrously lost his equanimity. Tensely putting the cup away he caught her with straining hands.

"Oh, Linda," he cried, "is it true that you love me! Do you really belong to us—to Vigné and Lowrie and me? I can't stand it if you won't . . . some day."

She backed away into the opening of a win-

dow, against the night, from the justice of his desire; and she was cold with self-detestation as her fingers touched the glass. Linda tried to speak, to lie; but, miserably still, she was unable to deceive him. The animation, the fervor of his longing, swiftly perished. His arms dropped to his side. An unbearable constraint deepened with the silence in the room, and later he lightly said:

"You mustn't trifle with my ancient heart, Linda, folly and age—"

XXVIII

THE only other quantity in her life was Dodge Pleydon. He wrote her again, perhaps three months after the explanation of his love; but his letter was devoted wholly to his work, and so technical that she had to ask Arnaud to interpret it. He added:

"That is the mind of an impressive man. He has developed enormously—curious, so late in life. Pleydon must be fully as old as myself. It's clear that he has dropped his women. I saw a photograph of the Cotton Mather reproduced in a weekly, and it was as gaunt as a Puritan Sunday. Brimmed with power. Why don't we see him oftener? Write and say I'd like to contradict him again about the Eastlake period."

He made no further reference to Pleydon then, and Linda failed to write as Arnaud suggested. Though she wasn't disturbed at the possibility of a continuation of his admissions of love she was weary of the thought of its uselessness. Linda was, she told herself, damned by

practicability. Her husband used the familiar term of reproach, material. She didn't in the least want to be. Circumstance, she had a feeling, had forced it upon her.

Arnaud, however, who had met Dodge Pleydon in Philadelphia, brought him home. Linda saw with a strange constriction of the heart that Pleydon's hair was definitely gray. He had had a recurrence of the fever contracted in Soochow. The men at once entered on another discussion which she was unable to follow; but it was clear that her husband now listened with an increasing surrender of opinion to the sculptor. Pleydon, it was true, was correspondingly more impatient with minds that disagreed with his. He was at once thinner and bigger, his face deeply lined; but his eyes had a steady vital intensity difficult to encounter.

She considered him in detail as the talk left dinner, the glasses and candles spent. He drank, from a tall tumbler with a single piece of ice, the special whisky Arnaud kept. He had been neglecting himself, too—there were traces of clay about his finger-nails, and he ate hurriedly and insufficiently. When she had an opportunity, Linda decided, she would speak to

him about these necessary trifles. Then, she had no chance; and it was not until the following winter, at a Thursday afternoon concert during the yearly exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts, that she could gently complain.

It was gloomy, with a promise of snow outside; and the great space of the stairway to the galleries was filled with shadow and the strains of *Armide* echoing from the orchestra playing at the railing above the entrance. Pleydon, together with a great many others, had spread an overcoat on the masonry of the steps, and they were seated in the obscurity of the balustrade.

"You look as though you hadn't had enough to eat," she observed. "You used to be almost thick but now you are a thing of terrifying grimness. You look like a monk. I wonder why you're like a monk, Dodge?"

"Linda Condon," he replied.

"That can't be it now; I haven't been Linda Condon for years, but Mrs. Arnaud Hallet. It's very pretty, of course, and I'd like to think you could keep a young love alive so long. Experience makes me doubt anything of the sort; but then I was always skeptical."

"You have never been anyone else," he as-

serted positively. "You were born Linda Condon and you'll die that, except for some extraordinary accident. I can't imagine what it would be—a miracle like quaker-ladies in the Antarctic."

"It sounds uncomplimentary, and I'm sick of being compared with polar places. What are quaker-ladies?"

"Fragile little flowers in the spring meadows."

"I'd rather listen to the music than you."

"That is why loving you is so eternal, why it doesn't fluctuate like a human emotion. You can't exhaust it and rest before a new tide sweeps back; the timeless ecstasy of a worship of God . . . breeding madness."

She failed to understand and turned a troubled gaze to his bitter repression. "I don't like to make you unhappy, Dodge," she said in a low tone. "What can I do? I am a horrid disappointment to all of you, but most to myself. I can't go over it again."

"Beauty has nothing to do with happiness," he declared harshly. He rose, without consulting her wishes; and Linda followed him as he proceeded above, irresistibly drawn to the bronze he was showing in the Rotunda.

It was the head and part of the shoulders of a very old woman, infinitely worn, starved by want and spent in brutal labor. There was a thin wisp of hair pinned in a meager knot on her skull; her bones were mercilessly indicated, barely covered with drum-like skin; her mouth was stamped with timid humility; while her eyes peered weakly from their sunken depths.

"Well?" he demanded, interrogating her in the interest of his work.

"I—I suppose it's perfectly done," she replied, at a loss for a satisfactory appreciation. "It's true, certainly. But isn't it more unpleasant than necessary?" Pleydon smiled patiently. "Beauty," he said, with his mobile gesture. "Pity, *Katharsis*—the wringing out of all dross."

The helpless feeling of her overwhelming ignorance returned. She was like a woman held beyond the closed door of treasure. "Come over here." He unceremoniously led her to the modeling of a ruffled grouse, faithful in every diversified feather. Linda thought it admirable, really amazing; but he dismissed it with a passionate energy. "The dull figuriste!" he exclaimed. "Daguerre. Once I could have done that, yes, and been entertained by its adroitness and in-

solence—before you made me. Do you suppose I was able then to understand the sheer tragic fortitude to live of a scrubwoman! The head you thought unpleasant—haven't you seen her going home in the March slush of a city? Did you notice the gaps in her shoes, the ragged shawl about a body twisted with forty, fifty, sixty years of wet stone floors and steps? Did you wonder what she had for supper?"

"No, Dodge, I didn't. They always make me wretched."

"Well, to realize all that, to feel the degradation of her nature, to lie, sick with exhaustion, on the broken slats of her bed under a ravelled-out travesty of a quilt, and get up morning after morning in an iron winter dark—to experience that in your spirit and put it into durable metal, hard stone—is to hold beauty in your hands."

Her interest in his speech was mingled with the knowledge that, in order to dress comfortably for dinner, she must leave immediately. Pleydon helped her into the Hallet open motor landaulet. Linda demanded quantities of air. He was, he told her at the door, leaving in an hour for New York. "I wish you could be happier," she insisted. He reminded her that he had had the

afternoon with her. It was so little, she thought, carried rapidly over a smooth wide street. His love for her increased rather than lessened. How wonderful it was. . . . The woman outside that barred door of treasure.

XXIX

LINDA thought frequently about Dodge and his feeling for her; memories of his words, his appearance, speculations, spread through her tranquil daily affairs like the rich subdued pattern of a fine carpet on the bare floor of her life. She was puzzled by the depth of a passion that, apparently, made no demands other than the occasional necessity to be with her and the knowledge that she existed. If she had been a very intelligent woman, and, of course, not quite bad-looking, she might have understood both Pleydon and Arnaud, the latter a man whose mind was practically absorbed in the pages of books. There could be no doubt, no question, of their love for her.

Then there had always been the others—the men at the parties, in her garden, through the old days of her childhood in hotels. It was very stupid, very annoying, but at the same time she became interested in what, with her candid indifference, affected them. She had never, really,

even when she desired, succeeded in giving them anything, anything conscious or for which they moved. Judith Feldt, on the contrary, had been prodigal. And, while certainly numbers of men had been attracted to her, they all tired of her with marked rapidity. Men met Judith, Linda recalled, with eagerness, they came immediately and often to see her . . . for, perhaps, a month. Then, temporarily deserted, she was submerged in depression and nervous tears.

But, while it was obviously impossible for all lovers to be constant, two extraordinary and superior men would be faithful to her as long as she lived, no—as long as they lived. This was beyond doubt. One was celebrated—she watched with a quiet pride Pleydon's fame penetrate the country—and the other, her husband, a person of the most exacting delicacy of habits, intellect and wit.

What was it, she wondered, that made the supreme importance of women to men worth consideration. Linda was thinking of this now in connection with her daughter. Vigné was fourteen; a larger girl than she had ever been, with her father's fine abundant cinnamon-brown hair, a shapely sensitive mouth, and a wide brown gaze

with a habit of straying, at inappropriate moments, from things seen to the invisible. She was, Linda realized thankfully, transparently honest; her only affectation was the slight supercilious manner of her associations; and she read, ridiculously like her father, with increasing pleasure.

However, what engaged Linda most was the fact that Vigné already liked men; she had been at the fringe, as it were, of young dances, with a sparkling satisfaction to herself and the securely nice youths who "cut in" at her brief appearances.

The truth was that Linda saw that more than a trace of Stella Condon's warm generosity of emotion had been brought by herself to Arnaud's daughter. The faults of every life, every circumstance, were endlessly multiplied through all existence. At fourteen, it was Linda's frowning impression, her mother had very fully instructed her in the wiles and structure of admirable marriage, and she had never completely lost some hard pearls of the elder's wisdom. Should she, in turn, communicate them to Vigné?

The moment, the anxiety, she dreaded was arriving, and it found her no freer of doubt than

had the other aspects of her own responses. Yet here she was possessed by the keenest need for absolute rectitude; and perhaps this, she thought, with an unusual pleasure, was an evidence of the affection she had seemed to lack. But in the end she said nothing.

She was still unable to disentangle the flesh from the spirit, love—the love that so amazingly illuminated Dodge Pleydon—from comfort. Dodge had disturbed all her sense of values, even to the point of unsettling her allegiance to the supremacy of a great deal of money. He had worked this without giving her anything definite, that she could explain to Vigné, in return. Linda preserved her demand for the actual. If she could only comprehend the force animating Dodge she felt life would be clear.

She was tempted to experiment—when had such a possibility occurred to her before?—and discover just how far in several directions Pleydon's devotion went. This would be easy now, she was unrestrained by the fact of Arnaud, and the old shrinking from the sculptor happily vanished. Yet with him before her, on one of his infrequent visits to their house, she realized that her courage was insufficient. Was it that or something

deeper—a reluctance to turn herself like a knife in the source of the profoundest compliment a woman could be paid. Linda thought too highly of his love for that; the texture of the carpet had become too gratifying.

They were all three in the library, as customary; and Linda, restless, saw her reflection in a closed long window. She was wearing yellow, the color of the jonquils on a candle-stand; but with her familiar sash tied and the ends falling to the hem of her skirt. The pointed oval of her face was unchanged, her pallor, the straight line of her black bang, the blueness of her eyes, were as they had been a surprisingly long while ago. Arnaud, with a disconcerting comprehension, demanded, "Well, are you satisfied?" She replied coolly, "Entirely." Pleydon, seated for over an hour without moving, or even the trivial relief of a cigarette, followed her with his luminous uncomfortable gaze, his disembodied passion.

XXX

LINDA heard Vigné's laugh, the expression of a sheer lightness of heart, following a low eager murmur of voices in her daughter's room, and she was startled by its resemblance to the gay pitch of Mrs. Moses Feldt's old merriment. Three of Vigné's friends were with her, all approximately eighteen, talking, Linda knew, men and—it was autumn—anticipating the excitements of their bow to formal society that winter. They had, she silently added, little enough to learn about the latter. Through the year past they had been to a dancing-class identical, except for an earlier hour and age, with mature affairs; but before that they had been practically introduced to the pleasures of their inheritance.

The men were really boys at the university, past the first year, receptacles of unlimited worldly knowledge and experience. They belonged to exclusive university societies and eating

clubs, and Linda found their stiff similarity of correct bigoted pattern highly entertaining. She had no illusions about what might be called their morals; they were midway in the period of youthful unrestraint; but she recognized as well that their attitude toward, for example, Vigné was irreproachable. Such boys affected to disdain the girls of their associated families . . . or imagined themselves incurably in love.

The girls, for their part, while insisting that forty was the ideal age for a lover—the terms changed with the seasons, last year "suitor" had been the common phrase—were occasionally swept in young company into a high irrational passion. Mostly, through skillful adult pressure or firm negation, such affairs came to nothing; but even these were sometimes overcome. And, when Linda had been disturbed by the echo of old days in her daughter's tones, she was considering exactly such a state.

One of the nicest youths imaginable, Bailey Sandby, had lost all trace of superior aloofness in a devotion to Vigné. He was short, squarely built, with clear pink cheeks, steady light blue eyes and crisp very fair hair. This was his last season of academic instruction, after which a

number of years, at an absurdly low payment, awaited him in his father's bond brokerage concern. However, he was, Linda gathered, imperious in his urgent need for Vigné's favor.

Ridiculous, she thought, at the same time illogically rehearsing the resemblances of Vigné to her grandmother. She had no doubt that the parties Vigné shared on the terraces and wide lawns, in the informal dancing at country houses, were sufficiently sophisticated; there was on occasion champagne, and—for the masculine element anyhow—cocktails. The aroma of wine, lightly clinging to her young daughter's breath, filled her with an old instinctive sickness.

She had spoken to Arnaud who, in turn, severely addressed Vigné; but during this Linda had been oppressed by the familiar feeling of impotence. The girl, of course, had properly heard them; but she gave her mother the effect of slipping easily beyond their grasp. When she had gone to bed Arnaud repeated a story brought to him by the juvenile Lowrie, under the influence of a temporary indignation at his sister's unwarranted imposition of superiority. Arnaud went on:

"Actually they had this kissing contest, it was

at Chestnut Hill, with a watch held; and Vigné, or so Lowrie insisted, won the prize for length of time—something like a minute. Now, when I was young—"

Submerged in apprehensive memory Linda lost most of his account of the Eden-like youth of his earlier day. When, at last, his assertions pierced her abstraction, it was only to bring her to the realization of how pathetically little he knew of either Vigné or her. She weighed the question of utter frankness here—the quality enhanced by universal obscurity—but she was obliged to check her desire for perfect understanding. A purely feminine need to hide, even from Arnaud, any detracting facts about women shut her into a diplomatic silence. In reality he could offer them no help; their problems—in a world created more objectively by the hand of man than God—were singular to themselves. Women were quite like spoiled captives to foreign princes, masking, in their apparent complacency, a necessarily secret but insidiously tyrannical control. It wouldn't do, in view of this, to expose too much.

The following morning it was Arnaud, rather than herself, who had a letter from Pleydon. "He wants us to come over to New York and his

studio," the former explained. "He has some commission or other from a city in the Middle West, and a study to show us. I'd like it very much; we haven't seen this place, and his surroundings are not to be overlooked."

Pleydon's rooms were directly off Central Park West, in an apartment house obviously designed for prosperous creative arts, with a hall frescoed in the tones of Puvis de Chavannes and an elevator cage beautifully patterned in iron grilling. Dodge Pleydon met them in his narrow entry and conducted them into a pleasant reception-room. "It's a duplex," he explained of his quarters; "the dining-room you see and the kitchen's beyond, while the baths and all that are over our heads; the studio fills both floors."

There were low book cases with their continuous top used as a shelf for a hundred various objects, deep long chairs of caressing ease and chairs of coffee-colored wicker with amazingly high backs woven with designs of polished shells into the semblance of spread peacocks' tails. The yellow silk curtains at the windows, the rug with the intricate coloring of a cashmere shawl, the Russian tea service, were in a perfection of order; and Linda almost resentfully acknowl-

edged the skilful efficiency of his maid. It was surprising that, without a wife, a man could manage such a degree of comfort!

Over tea far better than hers, in china of an infinitely finer fragility, she studied Pleydon thoughtfully. He looked still again perceptibly older, his face continued to grow sparer of flesh, emphasizing the aggressively bony structure of his head. When he shut his mouth after a decided statement she could see the projection of the jaw and the knotted sinews at the base of his cheeks. No, Dodge didn't seem well. She asked if there had been any return of the fever and he nodded in an impatient affirmative, returning at once to the temporarily suspended conversation with Arnaud. There was a vast difference, too, in the way in which he talked.

His attitude was as assertive as ever, but it had less expression in words; unaccountable periods of silence, almost ill-natured, overtook him, spaces of abstraction when it was plain that he had forgotten the presence of whoever might be by. Even direct questions sometimes failed to pierce immediately his consciousness. Dodge, Linda told herself, lived entirely too much alone. Then she said this aloud, thoughtlessly,

and she was startled by the sudden intolerable flash of his gaze. An awkward pause followed, broken by the uprearing of Pleydon's considerable length.

"I must take you into the studio before it is too dark," he proceeded. "Every creative spirit knows when its great moment has come. Well, mine is here." The men stood aside as Linda, her head positively ringing with the thrill that was like a strain of Gluck, the happy sadness, entered the bare high spaciousness of Dodge Pleydon's workroom.

XXXI

EVERYTHING she saw, the stripped floor, the white walls bare but for some casts like the dismembered fragments of flawless blanched bodies, the inclined plane of the wide skylight, bore an impalpable white dust of dried clay. In a corner, enclosed in low boards, a stooped individual with wood-soled shoes and a shovel was working a mass of clay over which at intervals he sprinkled water, and at intervals halted to make pliable lumps of a uniform size which he added to a pile wrapped in damp cloths. There were a number of modeling stands with twisted wires grotesquely resembling a child's line drawing of a human being; while a stand with some modeling tools on its edge bore an upright figure shapeless in its swathing of dampened cloths.

"The great moment," Pleydon said again, in a vibrant tone. "But you know nothing of all this," he directly addressed Linda. "Neither, probably, will you have heard of Simon Down-

ige. He was born at Cottarsport, in Massachusetts, about eighteen forty; and, after—in the support of his hatred of any slavery—he fought through the Civil War, he came home and found that his town stifled him. He didn't marry at once, as so many returning soldiers did; instead he was wedded to a vision of freedom, freedom of opinion, of spirit, worship—any kind of spaciousness whatever. And, in the pursuit of that, he went West.

"He told them that he was going to find—but found was the word—a place where men could live together in a purity of motives and air. No more, you understand; he hadn't a personal fanatical belief to exploit and attract the hysteria of women and insufficient men. He was not a pathological messiah; but only Simon Downige, an individual who couldn't comfortably breathe the lies and injustice and hypocrisy of the ordinary community. No doubt he was unbalanced—his sensitiveness to a universal condition would prove that. Normally people remain undisturbed by such trivialities. If they didn't an end would come to one or the other, the lies or the world.

"He traveled part way in a Conestoga wagon

—a flight out of Egypt; they were common then, slow canvas-covered processions with entire families drawn by the mysterious magnetism of the West. Then, leaving even such wayfarers, he walked, alone, until he came on a meadow by a little river and a grove of trees, probably cottonwoods. . . . That was Simon Downige, and that, too, was Hesperia. Yes, he was unbalanced—the old Greek name for beautiful lands. It is a city now, successful and corruptly administered—what always happens to such visions.

"It is necessary, Linda, as I've always told you, to understand the whole motive behind a creation in permanent form. A son of Simon's—yes, he finally married—a unique and very rich character, wife dead and no children, commissioned a monument to the founder of Hesperia, in Ohio, and of his fortune.

"They even have a civic body for the control of public building; and they came East to approve my statue, or rather the clay sketch for it. They were very solemn, and one, himself a sculptor, a graduate of the Beaux Arts, ran a suggestive thumb over Simon and did incredible damage. But, after a great deal of hesitation, and a description from the sculptor of what he

thought excellently appropriate for such magnificence, they accepted my study. The present Downige, really—though I understand there is another pretentious branch in Hesperia—bullied them into it. He cursed the Beaux-Arts graduate with the most brutal and satisfactory freedom—the tyranny of his money; the crown, you see, of Simon's hope."

He unwrapped one by one the wet cloths; and Linda, in an eagerness sharp like anxiety, finally saw the statue, under life-size, of a seated man with a rough stick and bundle at his feet. A limp hat was in his hand, and, beneath a brow to which the hair was plastered by sweat, his eyes gazed fixed and aspiring into a hidden dream perfectly created by his desire. Here, she realized at last, she had a glimmer of the beauty, the creative force, that animated Dodge Pleydon. Simon Downige's shoes were clogged with mud, his entire body, she felt, ached with weariness; but his gaze—nothing Linda discovered but shadows over two depressions—was far away in the attainment of his place of justice and truth.

She found a stool and, careless of the film of dust, sat absorbed in the figure. Pleydon again had lost all consciousness of their presence; he

stood, hands in pockets, his left foot slightly advanced, looking at his work from under drawn brows. Arnaud spoke first:

"It's impertinent to congratulate you, Pleydon. You know what you've done better than any one else could. You have all our admiration." Linda watched the tenderness with which the other covered Simon Downige's vision in clay. Later, returning home after dinner, Arnaud speculated about Pleydon's remarkable increase in power. "I had given him up," he went on; "I thought he was lost in those notorious debauches of esthetic emotions. Does he still speak of loving you?"

"Yes," Linda replied. "Are you annoyed by it?" He answered, "What good if I were?" She considered him, turned in his chair to face her, thoughtfully. "I haven't the slightest doubt of its quality, however—all in that Hesperia of old Downige's. To love you, my dear Linda, has certain well-defined resemblances to a calamity. If you ask me if I object to what you do give him, my answer must shock the gods of art. I would rather you didn't."

"What is it, Arnaud?" she demanded. "I haven't the slightest idea. I wish I had."

"Platonic," he told her shortly. "The term has been hopelessly ruined, yet the sense, the truth, I am forced to believe, remains."

"But you know how stupid I am and that I can't understand you."

"The woman in whom a man sees God," he proceeded irritably:

" '*La figlia della sua mente, l'amorosa idea.*' "

"Oh," she cried, wrung with a sharp obscure hurt. "I know that, I've heard it before." Her excitement faded at her absolute inability to place the circumstances of her memory. The sound of the words vanished, leaving no more than the familiar deep trouble, the disappointing sensation of almost grasping—Linda was unable to think what.

"After all, you are my wife." He had recovered his normal shy humor. "I can prove it. You are the irreproachable mother of our unsurpassed children. You have a hopeless vision—like this Simon's—of seeing me polished and decently pressed; and I insist on your continuing with the whole show."

Her mind arbitrarily shifted to the thought of her father, who had walked out of his house, left—yes—his family, without any intimation.

Then, erratically, it turned to Vigné, to Vigné and young Sandby with his fresh cheeks and impending penniless years acquiring a comprehension of the bond market. She said, "I wonder if she really likes Bailey?" Arnaud's energy of dismay was laughable, "What criminal folly! They haven't finished Mother Goose yet."

XXXII

LINDA, who expected to see Pleydon's statue of Simon Downige finished immediately in a national recognition of its splendor, was disappointed by his explanation that, probably, it would not be ready for casting within two years. He intended to model it again, life-size, before he was ready for the heroic. April, the vivifying, had returned; and, as always in the spring, Linda was mainly conscious of the mingled assuaging sounds of life newly admitted through open windows. A single shaded lamp was lighted by a far table, where Arnaud sat cutting the pages of *The Living Age* with an ivory blade; Dodge was blurred in the semi-obscurity.

He came over to see them more frequently now, through what he called the great moment—so tiresomely extended—of his life. Pleydon came oftener but he said infinitely less. It was his custom to arrive for dinner and suddenly depart early or late in the evening. At times she went

up to her room and left the two almost morosely silent men to their own thoughts or pages; at others she complained—no other woman alive would stay with such uninteresting and thoroughly selfish creatures. They never made the pretense of an effort to consider or amuse her. At this Arnaud would put aside his book and begin an absurd social conversation in the manner of Vigné's associates. Pleydon, however, wouldn't speak; nothing broke the somberness of his passionate absorption in invisible tyrannies. She gave up, finally, a persistent effort to lighten his moods. Annoyed she told him that if he did not change he'd be sick, and then where would everything be.

All at once, through the open window, she heard Stella, her mother, laughing; the carelessly gay sound overwhelmed her with an instinctive unreasoning dread. Linda rose with a half gasp—but of course it was Vigné in the garden with Bailey Sandby.

She sank back angry because she had been startled; but her irritation perished in disturbing thought. It wasn't, she told herself, Vigné's actions that made her fear the future so much as her, Linda's, knowledge of the possibilities of the

past. Her undying hatred of that existence choked in her throat; the chance of its least breath touching Vigné, Arnaud's daughter, roused her to any embittered hazard.

The girl, she was certain, returned a part at least of Bailey's feeling. Linda expected no confidences—what had she done to have them?—and Arnaud was right, affairs of the heart were never revealed until consummated. Her conclusion had been reached by indirect quiet deductions. Vigné, lately, was different; her attitude toward her mother had changed to the subtle reserve of feminine maturity. Her appearance, overnight, it seemed, had improved; her color was deeper, a delicate flush burned at any surprise in her cheeks, and the miracle of her body was perfected.

It wasn't, Linda continued silently, that Vigné could ever follow the example of Stella Condon through the hotels and lives of men partly bald, prodigal, and with distant families. Whatever happened to her would be in excellent surroundings and taste; but the result—the sordid havoc, inside and out, the satiety alternating with the points of brilliancy, and finally, inexorably, sweeping over them in a leaden tide—would be

identical. She wondered a little at the strength of her detestation for such living; it wasn't moral in any sense with which she was familiar; in fact it appeared to have a vague connection with her own revolt from the destruction of death. She wanted Vigné as well to escape that catastrophe, to hold inviolate the beauty of her youth, her fineness and courage.

She was convinced, too, that if she loved Bailey, and was disappointed, some of the harm would be done immediately; Linda saw, in imagination, the pure flame of Vigné's passion fanned and then arbitrarily extinguished. She saw the resemblance of the dead woman, all those other painted shades, made stronger. A sentence formed so vividly in her mind that she looked up apprehensively, certain that she had spoken it aloud:

If Vigné does come to care for him they must marry.

Her thoughts left the girl for Arnaud—he would absolutely oppose her there, and she speculated about the probable length his opposition would reach. What would he say to her? It couldn't be helped, in particular it couldn't be explained, neither to him nor to the friendly cor-

rectness of Bailey Sandby's mother. She, alone, must accept any responsibility, all blame.

The threatened situation developed more quickly than she had anticipated. Linda met Bailey, obviously disturbed, in the portico, leaving their house; his manner, mechanically, was good; and then, with an irrepressible boyish rush of feeling, he stopped her:

"Vigné and I love each other and Mr. Hallet won't hear of it. He insulted us with the verse about the old woman who went to the cupboard to get a bone, and if he hadn't been her father—" he breathed a portentous and difficult self-repression. "Then he took a cowardly advantage of my having no money, just now; right after I explained how I was going to make wads—with Vigné."

An indefinable excitement possessed Linda, accompanied by a sudden acute fear of what Arnaud might say. She wanted more than anything else in life to go quickly, inattentively, past Bailey Sandby and up to her room. Nothing could be easier, more obvious, than her disapproval of a moneyless boy. She made a step forward with an assumed resolute ignoring of his disturbed presence. It was useless. A dread greater than

her fright at Arnaud held her in the portico, her hand lifted to the polished knob of the inner door. Linda turned slowly, cold and white, "Wait," she said to his shoulder in an admirable coat; then she gazed steadily into his frank pained eyes.

"How do you know that you love Vigné?" she demanded. "You are so young to be certain it will last always. And Vigné—"

"How does any one know?" he replied. "How did you? Married people always forget their own experiences, the happy way things went with them. From all I see money hasn't much to do with loving each other. But, of course, I'm not going to be poor, not with Vigné. Nobody could. She'd inspire them. Mr. Hallet knows all about me, too; and he's the oldest kind of a friend of the family. I suppose when he sees father at the Rittenhouse Club they'll have a laugh—a laugh at Vigné and me." His hand, holding the brim of a soft brown hat, clenched tensely.

"No," Linda told him, "they won't do that." Her obscure excitement was communicated to him. "Why not?" he demanded.

"Because," she paused to steady her voice, "be-

cause I am going to take a very great responsibility. If it fails, if you let it fail, you'll ruin ever so much. Yes, Mr. Hallet, I am sure, will consent to your marrying Vigné." She escaped at the first opening from his incoherent gratitude. Arnaud was in the library, and she stopped in the hall, busy with the loosening of her veil. Perhaps it would be better to speak to him after dinner; she ought to question Vigné first; but, as she stood debating, her daughter passed her tempestuously, blurred with crying, and Arnaud angrily demanded her presence.

XXXIII

"YOU were quite right," he cried; "this young idiot Sandby has been telling Vigné that he loves her; and now Vigné assures me, with tears, that she likes it! They want to get married—next week, tomorrow, this evening." Linda stood by the window; soon the magnolia-tree would be again laden with flowers. She gathered her courage into a determined composure of tone. "I saw Bailey outside," she admitted. "He told me. It seems excellent to me."

Arnaud Hallet incredulously challenged her. "What do you mean—that you gave him a trace of encouragement!" Linda replied:

"I said that I was certain you would consent." She halted his exasperated gesture. "You think Vigné is nothing but a child, and yet she is as old as I was at our wedding. My mother was no older when Bartram Lowrie married her. I think Vigné is very fortunate,

Bailey is as nice as possible; and, as he said, it isn't as if you knew nothing of the Sandbys; they are as dignified as the Lowries."

An expression she had never before seen hardened his countenance into a sarcasm that travestied his customary humor. "You realize, of course, that except for what his father gives him young Sandby is wretchedly poor. He's nice enough but what has that to do with it? And, in particular, how does it touch you, Linda Condon? Do you suppose I can ever forget your answer that time I first asked you to marry me? You wouldn't consider a poor man; you were worth, really, a hundred thousand a year; but, if nothing better came along, you might sacrifice yourself for fifty."

"I remember very well," she answered; "and, curiously enough, I am not ashamed. I was very sensible then, in a horrible position with extravagant habits. They were me. I couldn't change myself. Without money I should have made you, any man, entirely miserable. Arnaud, I hadn't—I haven't now—the ability to see everything important through the affections, like so many many women. You often told me that; who hasn't? I have always admitted it wasn't

pleasant nor praiseworthy. But how, to use your own words, does all that affect Vigné? She isn't cold but very warm-hearted; and, instead of my experience, she has her own so much better feeling."

"I absolutely refuse to allow anything of the sort," he declared sharply. "I won't even discuss it—for three years. Tell this Sandby infant, if you like, to come back then."

"In three years, or in one year, Vigné may be quite different, yes—less lovable. Happiness, too, is queer, Arnaud; there isn't a great deal of it. Not an overwhelming amount. If it appears for an instant it must be held as tightly as possible. It doesn't come back, you know. Don't turn to your book yet—you can't get rid of us, of Vigné and me, like that; and then it's rude; the first time, I believe, you have ever been impolite to me."

"Forgive me," he spoke formally. "You seem to think that I am as indifferent as yourself. You might be asking the day of the week to judge from your calm appearance. The emotion of a father, or even of a mother, perhaps, you have never explored. On the whole you are fortunate.

And you are always protected by your celebrated honesty." She said:

"I promised Bailey your consent."

"Why bother about that? It isn't necessary for your new romantic mood. An elopement, with you to steady the ladder, would be more appropriate."

She repeated the fact of her engagement. Her dread for him had vanished, its place now taken by a distrust of what, in her merged detachment and suffering, she might blunderingly do. At the back of this she realized that his case, his position, was hopeless. Without warning, keen and undimmed, his love for her flashed through his resentful misery. There was no spoken acknowledgement of surrender; he sank into his chair dejected and pitiable, infinitely gray. His shoes, on the brightness of the hooked rug, were dingy, his coat drawn and wrinkled.

Linda saw herself on her knees before him, before his patience and generosity, sobbing her contrition into his forgiving hands. She longed with every nerve—as she had so often before—to lose herself in passionate emotion. She had never

been more erect or withdrawn, never essentially less touched. After a little, waiting for him to speak, she saw that he, too, had retreated into the profound depths of his own illusions and despairs.

XXXIV

FOR a surprising while—even in the face of Vigné's radiance—Arnaud was as still and shadowed as the inert surface of a dammed stream. Then slowly, the slenderest trickle at first, his wit revived his spirit; and he opened an unending mock-solemn attack on Bailey Sandby's eminently serious acceptance of the responsibilities of his allowed love.

The boy had left the university, and his father —a striking replica of Arnaud's prejudices, impatience and fundamental kindness—exchanged with Vigné's male parent the most dismal prophecies together with concrete plans for their children's future security. This, inevitably, resulted in Vigné's marriage; a ceremony unattended by Pleydon except by the presence of a very liberal check.

The life-size version of his Simon Downige was again under way—it had been torn down, Linda knew, more than once—and he was in a fever of composition. Nor was this, she de-

cided with Arnaud, his only oppression: the Asiatic fever clung to him with disquieting persistence. Pleydon himself admitted he had a degree or two in the evening.

Linda was seated in his studio near Central Park West, perhaps a year later, and she observed aloud that so much wet clay around was bad for him. He laughed: nothing now could happen to him, he was forever beyond accident, sickness, death—his statue for the monument in Hesperia was finished. It stood revealed before them, practically as Linda had first seen it, but enlarged, towering, as if the vision it portrayed had grown, would continue to grow eternally, because of the dignity of its hope, the necessity of its realization.

"Now," she said, "it will go to the foundry and be cast." He corrected her. "You will go to the foundry and be cast . . . in bronze." A distinct graceful happiness possessed her at the knowledge that his love for her was as constant as though it, too, were metal. Not flesh but bronze, spirit, he insisted.

The multiplying years made that no more comprehensible than when, a child, she had thrilled in a waking dream. Love, spirit, death. Three

mysteries. But only one, she thought, was inevitably hers, the last. To be loved was not love itself, but only the edge of its cloak; response was an indivisible part of realization. No, sterility was the measure—of its absence. And she was, Linda felt, in spite of Vigné and Lowrie, the latter a specially vigorous contradiction, the most sterile woman alive. There were always Dodge's assurances, but clay, stone, metal, were cold for a belief to embrace. And she was, she knew, lovelier now than she had ever been before, than she would ever be again.

XXXV

THE faint ringing of the bell from outside that probably announced Arnaud sounded unreal, futile, to Linda. He came into the studio, and at once a discussion began between the two men of the difference in the surfaces of clay and bronze. The talk then shifted to the pictorial sources of the heroic Simon Downige before them, and Linda declared, "Dodge, you have never made a head of me. How very unflattering!"

"You're an affair for a painter," he replied; "Goya or Alfred Stevens. No one but Goya could have found a white for you, with the quality of flower petals; and Stevens would have fixed you in an immortality of delicate color, surrounded by your Philadelphia garden." He stood quite close to her, with his jacket dragged forward by hands thrust into its pockets, and he added at the end of a somber interrogation, "But if you would really like to know why—"

In a moment more, she recognized, Dodge

would explain his feeling for her—to Arnaud, to any one who might be present. The gleam in his eyes, his remoteness from earthly concern, were definitely not normal. Pleydon, his love, terrified her. "No," she said with an assumed hurried lightness, "don't try to explain. I must manage to survive the injury to my vanity."

They left New York almost immediately, Pleydon suddenly determining to go with them; and later were scattered through the Hallet household. Vigné and her husband were temporarily living there; with their heads close together they were making endless computations, numerous floor plans and elevations. Linda, at the piano in the drawing-room, could hear them through the hall. Pleydon was lounging in a chair beyond her. She couldn't play but she was able, slowly, to pick out the notes of simple and familiar airs—echoes of Gluck and blurred motives of Scarlatti. It was for herself, she explained; the sounds, however crude and disconnected, brought things back to her. What things, she replied to Pleydon's query, she didn't in the least know; but pleasant.

The fact that she understood so little depressed her with increasing frequency. It was well

enough to be ignorant as a girl, or even as a young woman newly married; but she had left all that behind; she had lost her youth without any compensating gain of knowledge. Linda could not assure herself that life was clearer than it had been to her serious childhood. It had always been easily measured on the surface; she had had a very complete grasp of its material aspects almost at once, accomplishing exactly what she had planned. Perhaps this was all; and her trouble an evidence of weakness—the indecision, she saw with contempt, that kept so many people in a constant agitation of disappointment.

Perhaps this was enough; more than the majority had or accomplished. She made, again, a resolute effort to be contented, at rest. Her straying fingers clumsily wrought a fragmentary refrain that mocked her determination. It wasn't new, this—this dissatisfaction; but it had grown sharper. As she was older her restlessness increased at the realization that life, opportunity, were slipping from her. Soon she would be forty.

The conviction seized her that most lives reflected hers in that their questioning was never

answered. The fortunate, then, were the incurious and the hearts undisturbed by a maddening thrill. She said aloud, "The ones who never heard music." Pleydon was without a sign that she had spoken. Her emotions were very delicate, very fragile, and enormously difficult to perceive. They were like plants in stony ground. Where had she heard that—out of the Bible? Then she thought of her failure to get anything from religion—a part of her inability to drink at the springs which others declared so refreshing. Linda pressed her hands more sharply on the keys and the answering discord had the effect of waking her to reality.

Pleydon remained until the following afternoon, and then was lost—in the foundry casting his statue—for six months. Arnaud went over to view the completion of the bronze and returned filled with enthusiasm. "Its simplicity is the surprising part," he told her. "The barest statement possible. But Pleydon himself is in a disturbing condition; I can't decide if it is mental or physical. The fever of course; yet that doesn't account for his distance from ordinary living. The truth is, I suppose, that men weren't designed for great arts, and nature, like the jealous God of

the Hebrews, retaliates. It is absurd, but Pleydon reminds me of you; you're totally different. I suppose it's because of the detachment you have in common." He veered to a detail of Lowrie's first year at a university, and exhibited, against a decent endeavor to the contrary, his boundless pride in their son.

The boy was, Linda acknowledged, more than commonly dependable and able. He was heavy, like his father, and so diffident that he almost stuttered; but his mental processes flashed in quick intuitive perceptions. Lowrie was an easy and brilliant student; and, perhaps because of this, of his mental certainty, he was not intimate with her as Arnaud had hoped and predicted. It seemed to Linda that he instinctively penetrated her inner doubt and regarded it without sympathy. In this he was her son. Lowrie was a confident and unsympathetic critic of humanity.

Even now, so soon, there was no question of his success in the law his fitness had elected. The springs of his being were purely intellectual, reasoning. In him Linda saw magnified her own coldness; and, turned on herself, she viewed it with an arbitrary feminine resentment. He was actually courteous to her; but under all their

intercourse there was a perceptible impatience. His scorn of other women, girls, however, was openly expressed and honest; it had no trace of the mere affectation of pessimism natural to his age. Arnaud, less thoughtful than she, was vastly entertained by this, and drew Lowrie out in countless sly sallies and contradictions.

Yes, he would succeed, but, after all, what would his success be worth—placed, that was, against Vigné's radiant happiness, Bailey Sandby's quiet eyes and the quality of his return home each evening?

Her thoughts came back to Pleydon—she had before her a New York paper describing the ceremony of unveiling his Simon Downige at Hesperia. There was a long learned article praising its beauty and emphasizing Pleydon's eminence. He was, it proceeded, an anomaly in an age of momentary experimental talents—a humanized Greek force. He didn't belong to to-day but to yesterday and to-morrow. This gave her an uncomfortable vision of Dodge in space, with no warm points of contact. She, too, was suspended in that vague emptiness. Linda had the sensation of grasping at streamers, forms, of sparkling mist. A strange position in view of her unde-

niable common sense, the solid foundations of her temperament and experience. She saw from the paper, further, that the Downige who had commissioned the monument was dead.

XXXVI

IN the middle of the festive period that connected Christmas with the new year Arnaud turned animatedly from his breakfast scanning of the news. "It seems," he told her, "that a big rumpus has developed in Hesperia over the Pleydon statue—the present Downige omnipotence, never friendly with our old gentleman, has condemned its bronze founder. You know what I mean. It's an insult to their pride, their money and position, to see him perpetuated as a tramp. On the contrary he was a very respectable individual from a prominent family and town.

"They have been moving the local heavens, ever since the monument was placed, to have it set aside. I suppose they would have succeeded, too, if a large amount given to the city were not contingent on its preservation. But then they can always donate more money in the cause of their sacred respectability."

Linda had never, she exclaimed, heard of anything more disgusting. It was plain that Hes-

peria knew nothing of art. "Every one," she ran on in the heat of her resentment, "every one, that is, who should decide, agrees it's magnificent. They were frightfully lucky to get it—Dodge's finest work." She wrote at once to Pleydon commanding his presence and expressing her contempt of such depravity of opinion. To her surprise he was undisturbed, apparently, by the condemnation of his monument.

He even laughed at her energy of scorn. She was hurt, perceptibly silenced, with a feeling of having been misunderstood or rather undervalued. Her disturbance at any blame attached to the statue of Simon Downige was extremely acute. But, she thought, if it failed to worry Dodge why should she bother. She did, in spite of this philosophy; Simon was tremendously important to her.

He stood for things: she had watched his evolution from the clay sketch, and in Pleydon's mind, to the final heroic proportions; and she had taken for granted that a grateful world would see him in her light. A woman, she decided, had made the trouble; and she hated her with a personal vigor. Pleydon said:

"I told you that old Simon was unbalanced;

now you can see it by his reception in a successful city. The sculptor—do you remember him, a Beaux-Arts graduate?—admits that he had always opposed it, but that political motives overbore his pure protest. There is a scheme now to build a pavilion, for babies, and shut out the monument from open view. They may do that but time will sweep away their walls. If I had modeled Simon Downige, yes, he would go; but I modeled his vision, his aspiration—the hope of all men for release and purity.

"Downige and the individual babies are unimportant compared to a vision of perfection, of escape. As long as men live, if they live, they'll reach up; and that gesture in itself is heaven. Not accomplishment. The spirit dragging the flesh higher; but spirit alone—empty balloons. A dream in bronze, harder even than men's heads, more durable than their prejudices, so permanent that it will wear out their ignorance; and in the end—always in the end—they'll bring their wreath.

"A replica has gone to Cottarsport, from me; and you ought to see it there, on a block of New England granite. It's in the Common, a windswept reach with low houses and a white steeple

and the sea. It might have been there from the beginning, rising on rock against the pale salt day. They can go to hell in Hesperia."

Still Linda's hurt persisted; she saw the unfortunate occurrence as a direct blow at her pride. Arnaud, too, failed her; he was splendid in his assault upon such rapacious stupidity; but it was only an impersonal concern. His manner expressed the conviction that it might have been expected. He was blind to her special enthusiasm, her long intimate connection with the statue. Exasperated she almost told him that it was more real to her than their house, than Vigné and Lowrie, than he. She was stopped, fortunately, by the perception that, amazingly, the statue was more actual than Dodge Pleydon. It touched the center of her life more nearly.

Why, she didn't know.

If her mental confusion increased by as much as a feeling, Linda thought, she would be close to madness. It was unbearable at practically forty.

Lowrie said, at the worst possible moment, that he found the entire episode ridiculously overemphasized. A statue more or less was of small

importance. If the Downige family were upset why didn't they employ an able lawyer to dispose of it? There were many ways for such a proceeding—

"I have no desire to hear them," she interrupted. "You seem to know a tremendous lot, but what good it will do you in the end who can say! And, with all your cleverness, you haven't an ounce of appreciation for art. Besides, I hate to see any one as young as you so sure of himself. Often I suspect you are patronizing your father and me. It's not pretty nor polite."

Lowrie was obviously embarrassed by her attack, and managed the abrupt semblance of an apology. Arnaud, who had put down his eternal book, said nothing until the boy had vanished. "Wasn't that rather sharp?" he asked mildly. "Perhaps," she replied in a tone without warmth or regret. "Somehow I am never comfortable with Lowrie."

"You are too much alike," he shrewdly observed. "It is laughable at times. Did you expect your children to be fountains of sentiment? And, look here—if I can get along in comfort with you for life you in particular ought

to put up peacefully with Lowrie. He is a damned sight more human than, at bottom, you are; a woman of alabaster."

"I loathe quarrels," she admitted; "they are so vulgar. You know that they are not like me and just said so. Oh, Arnaud, why does life get harder instead of easier?"

He put his book aside completely and gazed at her in patient thought. "Linda," he said finally, "I have never heard anything that stirred me so much; not what you said, my dear, but the recognition in your voice." A wistfulness of love for her enveloped him; an ineffable desire as vain as the passion she struggled to give him in return. She smiled in an unhappiness of apology.

"Perhaps—" he stopped, waiting any assurance whatever, his face eager like a dusty lamp in which the light had been turned sharply up. She was unable to stir, to move her gaze from his hopeful eyes, to mitigate by a breath her slender white aloofness. A smile different from hers, tender with remission, lingered in his fading irradiation. The dusk was gathering, adding its melancholy to his age—sixty-five now. Why that was an old man! Her sympathy vanished in her shrinking from the twilight that was, as

well, slowly, inevitably, deepening about her.

It was laughable that, as she approached an age whose only resource was tranquillity, she grew more restless. Her present vague agitation belonged ridiculously to youth. The philosophy of the evident that had supported her so firmly was breaking at the most inopportune time. And it was, she told herself, too late for anything new; the years for that had been spent insensibly with Arnaud. Linda was very angry with herself, for, in all her shifting state of mind, she preserved an inner necessity for the quality of exactness expressed in her clothes. There were literally no neglected spaces in her conscious living.

Her thoughts finally centered about the statue in Hesperia—it presented an actual mark for her fleeting resentments. She wondered why it so largely occupied her thoughts, moved her so personally. She watched the papers for the scattered reports of the progress of the contention it had roused, some ill-natured, others supposedly humorous, and nearly all uninformed. She became, Arnaud said, the champion of the esthetic against Dagon. He elaborated this picture until she was forced to smile against her inclination, her profound seriousness. Linda had the feel-

ing that she, too, was on the pedestal that held the bronze effigy of Simon Downige challenging the fog that obscured men. Its fate was hers. She didn't pretend to explain how.

As time passed it seemed to her that it took her longer and longer to dress in the morning, while her preparations couldn't be simpler; her habit of deliberation had become nearly a vice, the precision of her ruffles, her hair, a tyranny. She never quite lost the satisfaction of her mirror's faultless reflection; and stopped, now, for a moment's calm interrogation of the being—hardly more silvery cool than the reality—before her.

Arnaud was at the table, and the gaze with which he met her was troubled. The morning paper, she saw, was, against custom, at her place, and she picked it up with an instinctive sense of calamity. The blackly printed sensational headline that immediately established her fear sank vivid and entire into her brain: an anonymous inflamed mob in Hesperia had pulled down and destroyed Pleydon's statue. Their act was described as a tribute to the liberality of the present Downige family in the light of its objection to the monument.

As if in the development of her feeling Linda

had a sensation of crashing with a sickening violence from a pedestal to the ground. Actually, it seemed, the catastrophe had happened to her. She heard, with a sense of inutility, Arnaud denouncing the outrage; he had a pencil in his hand for the composition of a telegram to Dodge. He paid—but perhaps only naturally—no attention to her, suffering dully from her fall. She shuddered before the recreated lawless approaching voice of the mob; the naked ugly violence froze her with terror; she felt the gross hurried hands winding ropes about her, the rending brutality of force—

She sat and automatically took a small carved glass of orange-juice from a bed of ice, and her chilled fingers recalled a dim image of her mother. Arnaud was speaking, "I'm afraid this will cut through Pleydon's security, it was such a wanton destruction of his unique power. You see, he worked lovingly over the cast with little files and countless finite improvements. The mold, I think, was broken. What a piece of luck the thing's at Cottarsport." He paused, obviously expecting her to comment; but suddenly phrases failed her.

In place of herself she should be considering

Dodge; her sympathy even for him was submerged in her own extraordinary injury. However, she recovered from her first gasping shock, and made an utterly commonplace remark. Never had her sense of isolation been stronger. "I must admit," her husband continued, "that I looked for some small display of concern. I give you my word there are moments when I think Pleydon himself cut you out of stone. He isn't great enough for that, though; in the way of perfection you successfully gild the lily. A thing held to be impossible."

Linda told him with amazing inanity that his opinion of her was unreliable; and, contented, he lightly pursued his admiration of what he called her boreal charm. At intervals she responded appropriately and proceeded with breakfast. She had entered a region of dispassionate consideration, her characteristic detachment, she thought, regained. She mentally, calmly, reconstructed the motives and events that had led to the destruction of the statue; they, at least, were evident to her. She reaffirmed silently her conviction that it had resulted from the stupidity, the vanity, of a woman. The limitations of men, fully as narrow, operated in other directions.

Then, with an incredulous surprise, she was aware that the clear space of her reason was filling with anger. Never before had such a flood of emotion possessed her; and she surrendered herself, in an enormous relief, to the novelty of its obliterating tide. It deepened immeasurably, sweeping her far from the security of old positions of indifference and critical self-possession. Linda became enraged at a world that had concentrated all its degraded vulgarity in one unspeakable act.

XXXVII

IT was fall, October, and the day was a space of pale gold foliage wreathed in blue garlands of mist. The gardener was busy with a wooden rake and wheelbarrow in which he carted away dead leaves for burning. The fire was back of the low fence, in the rear, and Linda, at the dining-room window, could hear the fierce small crackle of flames; the drifting pungent smoke was like a faint breath of ammonia. Arnaud had left for the day, Lowrie was at the university, while Vigné and her husband—moving toward their ultimate colonial threshold—had taken a small house. She was alone.

As usual.

However, in her present state her solitude had lost its inevitability; she failed to see why it must continue until the end of time. She could no longer discover a sufficient reason for her limitless endurance, her placid acceptance of all that chance, or any inconsiderable person, happened to dictate. She wasn't like that in the least.

Her temper had solidified as though it were ice, taking everywhere the form in which it was held. It was a reality. She determined, as well, that her feeling should not melt back into the familiar acceptance of a routine that had led her blindfolded across such an extent of life.

She understood now, in a large part, her disturbance at the indignity to Dodge's monument—he had assured her that she was its inspiration; except for her it would never have been realized, he would have kept on modeling those Newport fountains, continued with the Susanna Nodas, spending himself ignobly. He loved her, and that love had resulted in a statue the world of art, of taste, honored. But it was she all the while they were approving, discussing, writing about, Linda Condon.

She had always been that, Pleydon had informed her, never Linda Hallet—in spite of Arnaud and their children. It sounded like nonsense; but, at the bottom, it was truth. Of course it couldn't be explained, for example, to the man who had every right, every evidence, to consider himself her husband. Nothing was susceptible of explanation. Absolutely nothing! There was the earth, which appeared to be every-

thing, the houses you entered, the streets you passed over, the people among whom you lived, yet that wasn't all. Heavens, no! It was quite unimportant compared with—with other facts latent in the mind and blood.

Dodge Pleydon's love was one of those other facts; it was simply impossible to deny its existence, its power. Dodge had been totally changed by it, born over again. But she, who had been the source, had had no good from it, nothing except the thrill that had always been hers. No one knew of it, counted it as her achievement, paid the slightest attention to her. Arnaud smiled indulgently, Lowrie scoffed. When the statue had been thrown down they thought of it merely as a deplorable part of the day's news. They hadn't seen that she, Linda Condon, was unspeakably insulted.

She doubted if she could bring them to comprehend what had happened—to her. Or if Arnaud understood, if she made it plain, what good would be done! That wouldn't save her, put her back again on the pedestal. The latter was necessary. Linda recognized that a great deal of her feeling was based on pride; but it was a pride entirely justified. She had no in-

tention of submitting to the coarse hands and ropes of public affront. Throughout her life she had rebelled against any profanation of her person, she had hated to be touched.

Every instinct, she found, every delicate self-opinion, was bound into Pleydon's success; the latter had kept her alive. Without it existence would have been intolerable. It was unbearable now.

She discharged the small daily duties of her efficient housekeeping with a contemptuous exactness; for years she had accomplished, in herself, nothing more. But at last a break had come. Linda recognized this without any knowledge of what reparation it would find. She wasn't concerned with that, a small detail. It would be apparent. Arnaud was silent through dinner; tired, it seemed. She saw him as if at the distant end of a dull corridor—as she looked back. There was no change in her liking for him. Mechanically she noticed the disorder of his scant hair and rumpled sleeves.

Not until, waking sharply, in the middle of the night, did she have a glimpse of a possible course—she might live with Dodge and perfectly express both her retaliation and her accomplish-

ment. In that way she would reëstablish herself beside him and place their vision in bronze on an elevation beyond the spite of the envious and the blind.

It was so directly simple that she was surprised it hadn't occurred to her before. The possibility had always been a part, unsuspected and valuable, of her special being; the largely condemned faults of her character and experience had at least brought her this—a not inconsiderable freedom in a world everywhere barred by the necessity for upholding a hypocritical show of superiority to honest desire. The detachment that deprived her of life's conventional joys released her from its common obligations. That conviction, however, was too intimately connected with all her inheritance to bring her any conscious dramatic sense of rebellion or high feeling of justified indignation.

Sleep had deserted her, and she waited for the dawn in the windows that would bring her escape. It was very slow coming; the blackness took on a grayer tone, like ink with added faint infusions of water. Slowly the blackness dissolved and she heard the stir of the sparrows in the ivy. There was the passing rumble of

an early electric car on the paved aged street, the blurred hurried shuffle of a workman's clumsy shoes. The brightening morning was cool with a premonitory touch of frost; at the window she saw a vanishing silver sheen on the lawn and board fence.

A sensation of youth pervaded her; and while, perhaps, it was out of keeping with her years, she had still her vitality unspent; she was without a trace of the momentary frost on the grass. She was tranquil, leisurely; her heart evenly sent its life through her unflushed body. Piece by piece she put on her web-like garments, black and white; brushing the heavy stream of her hair and tying the inevitable sash about her supple waist.

Below she met Arnaud with an unpleasant shock—she hadn't given him a thought. Her feeling now was hardly more than annoyance at her forgetfulness. He would be terribly distressed at her going, and she was genuinely sorry for this, poised at the edge of an explanation of her purpose. Arnaud was putting butter and salt into his egg-cup, after that he would grind the pepper from a French mill—pure spices were a precision of his—and she waited until the operation was completed.

Then it occurred to her that all she could hope to accomplish by admitting her intention was the ruin of his last hour alone with her. He was happier, gayer, than usual. But his age was evident in his voice, his gestures. Linda marveled at her coldness, her ruthless disregard of Arnaud's claim on her, of his affection as deep as Pleydon's, perhaps no less fine but not so imperative. Yet Arnaud had had over twenty years of her life, the best; and she had never deceived him about the quality of her gift. It was right, now, for Dodge to have the remainder. But whether it were right or wrong, there was no failure of her determination to go to Pleydon in the vindication of her existence.

She delayed speaking to Arnaud until, suddenly, breakfast was over. He seldom went to the law office where he had been a partner, but stayed about the lower floor of his house, in the library or directing small outside undertakings. Either that or he left, late, for the Historical Society, with which his connection and interest were uninterrupted. As Linda passed him in the hall he was fumbling in the green bag that accompanied all his journeyings into the city; and she gathered that he intended to make one of his

occasional sallies. She proceeded above, to her room, where with steady hands she pinned on her hat. It would be impossible to take any additional clothes, and she'd have to content herself with something ready-made until she could order others in the establishment of her living with Dodge. Her close-fitting jacket, gloves, and a short cape of sables were collected; she gazed finally, thoughtfully, about the room, and then, with a subdued whisper of skirts, descended the stair. Arnaud was in the library, bending over the table that bore his accumulation of papers and serious journals. A lingering impulse to speak was overborne by the memory of what, lately, she had endured—she saw him at the dusty end of that long corridor through which she had monotonously journeyed, denied of her one triumph, lost in inconsequential shadows—and she continued firmly to the door which closed behind her with a normal mute smoothness, an inanimate silence.

XXXVIII

THE maid who admitted Linda to Pleydon's apartment, first replying, "Yes, Mrs. Hallet. No, Mrs. Hallet," to her questions, continued in fuller sentences expressing a triumph of sympathy over mere correctness. She lingered at the door of the informal drawing-room, imparting the information that Mr. Pleydon had become very irregular indeed about his meals, and that his return for lunch was uncertain. Something, however, would be prepared for her. Linda acknowledged this briefly. Often, with Mr. Pleydon at home, he wouldn't so much as look at his dinner. Times, too, it seemed as though he had been in the studio all night. He went out but seldom now, and rarely remained away for more than an hour or two. Linda heard this without an indication of responsive interest, and the servant, returning abruptly from the excursion into humanity, disappeared.

She was glad to have this opportunity alone to accustom herself to a novel position. But she

was once more annoyingly calm. Annoyingly, she reiterated; the fervor of her anger, which at the same time had been bitterly cold, had lessened. She was practically normal. She regarded this, the loss of her unprecedented emotion, in the light of a fraud on her sanguine decision. Linda had counted on its support, its generous irresistible tide, to carry her through the remainder of her life with the exhilaration she had so largely missed.

Here in Dodge's room she was as placid, almost, as though she were in the library at home. That customary term took its place in her thoughts before she recognized that, with her, it had shifted. However, it was unimportant—home had never been a magical word to her; it belonged in the vast category which, of such universal weight, left her unstirred. She resembled those Eastern people restlessly and perpetually moving across sandy deserts as they exhausted, one after another, widely separated scanty oases.

She studied the objects around her with the pleased recognition that they were unique, valuable, and in faultless taste. Then she fell to wondering at the difference had Dodge been poor: she would have come to him, Linda knew, just

the same. But, she admitted frankly, it would have been uncomfortable. Perhaps that—actual poverty, actual deprivation—was what her character needed. A popular sentiment upheld such a view; she decided it was without foundation. There was no reason why beauty, finely appropriate surroundings, should damage the spirit.

Her mind turned to an examination of her desertion of Arnaud, but she could find no trace of conventional regret; of what, she felt, her sensation ought to be. The instinctive revolt from oblivion was an infinitely stronger reality than any allegiance to abstract duty. She was consumed by the passionate need to preserve the integrity of being herself. The word selfish occurred to her but to be met unabashed by the query, why not? Selfishness was a reproach applied by those who failed to get what they wanted to all who succeeded. Linda wasn't afraid of public opinion, censure; she didn't shrink even from the injury to her husband. What Dodge would think, however, was hidden from her.

She had no doubt of his complete acceptance of all she offered; ordinary obligations to society bound him as little as they held her. It would be enough that she wanted to come to him.

She would bother him, change his habit of living, very little. Long years of loneliness had taught her to be self-sufficient. Linda would be too wise to insist on distasteful regularity in the interest of a comparatively unimportant well-being. In short, she wouldn't bother him. That must be made clear at once.

More than anything else he would be inexpressibly delighted to have her with him, to find —at last—his love. Little intimacies of satin mules, glimpses, charming to an artist! He'd be faultless, too, in the relationships where Arnaud as well had never for a moment deviated from beautiful consideration. Two remarkable men. While her deficiency in humor was admitted, she saw a glimmer of the absurd in her attitude and present situation. The combination, at least, was uncommon. There had been no change in her feeling for either Arnaud or Dodge, their places in her being were undisturbed; she liked her husband no less, Dodge no better.

Lunch was announced, a small ceremony of covered silver dishes, heavy crystal, Nankin china, and flowers. The linen, which was old, bore a monogram unfamiliar to her—that of Dodge's mother, probably. When she had

finished, but was still lingering at the narrow refectory table, she heard Pleydon enter the hall and the explanatory voice of the servant. An unexpected embarrassment pervaded her, but she overcame it by the realization that there was no need for an immediate announcement of her purpose. Dodge would naturally suppose that she was in New York shopping.

He did, to her intense relief, with a moving pleasure that she had lunched with him. "It's seldom," he went on, "that you are so sensible. I hope you haven't any plans or concerts to drag you away immediately. I owe you a million strawberries; but, aside from that, I'd like you to stay as long as possible."

"Very well," she replied quietly; "I will."

She hadn't seen him since the statue at Hesperia had been destroyed, and she tried faintly to tell him how much that outrage had hurt her. It had injured him too, she realized; just as Arnaud predicted. He showed his age more gauntly, more absolutely, than the other. His skin was dry as though the vitality of his countenance had been burned out by the flame visible in his eyes.

"The drunken fools!" he exclaimed of the mob

that had torn Simon Downige from his eminence; "they came by way of all the saloons in the city. Free drinks! That is the disturbing thing about what the optimistic call civilization—the fact that it is always at the mercy of the ignorant and the brutal. There is no security; none, that is, except in the individual spirit. And they, mostly, are the victims of a singular insane resentment—Savonarola and there were greater.

"But you mustn't think, you mustn't suppose, that I mean it's hopeless. How could I? Who has had more from living? Love and complete self-expression. That exhausts every possibility. Three words. Remember Cottarsport. But the love—ah," he smiled, but not directly at her. Linda was at once reassured and disturbed; and she rose, proceeding into the drawing-room.

There she sat gracefully composed and with still hands; she never embroidered or employed her leisure with trivial useful tasks. Pleydon was extended on a chair, his fingers caught beyond his head and his long legs thrust out and crossed at the ankles. His gaze was fixed on her unwaveringly; and yet, when she tried to meet its focus, it went behind her as though it pierced the solidity of her body and the walls in the con-

templation of a far-removed shining image. Her disturbance grew to the inclusion of a degree of fretfulness at his unbroken silence, his apparent absorption in whatever his meditation projected or found.

XXXIX

NOW, she decided, was the moment for her revelation; or rather, it couldn't very well be further deferred, for it promised to be halting. But, with her lips forming the words, he abruptly spoke:

"I have lived so long with your spirit, it has become so familiar—I mean the ability of completely making you out of my heart—that when you are here the difference isn't staggering. You see, you are never away. I have that ability; it came out of the other wreck. But you know about it—from years back. Time has only managed a greater power. Lately, and I have nothing to do with it, I have been seeing you again as a girl; as young as at Markue's party; younger. Not more than ten. I don't mean that there is anything—isn't the present fashionable word subliminal?—esoteric. God forbid. You'll remember my hatred of that brutal deception.

"No, it's only a part of my ability to create the shape of feeling, of Simon's hope. I see things as realities capable of exact statement; and, naturally, more than all the rest, you come to me that way. But as a child—who knows why?" he relinquished the answer with an opened palm. "And young like that, perhaps ten, I love you more sharply, more unutterably, than at any other age. What is it I love? Not your adorable plastic body, not that. It isn't necessary to understand.

"You have, as a child, a quality of blinding loveliness in a world I absolutely distrust. An Elysian flower. Is it possible, do you suppose, to worship an abstract idea? It's not important to insist on my sanity."

The question of that had occurred independently to Linda; his hurried voice and lost gaze filled her with apprehension. A dull reddish patch, she saw, burned in either thin cheek; and she told herself that the fever had revived in him. Pleydon continued:

"Yet it is a timeless vision, because you never get old. I see Hallet failing year by year, and your children, only yesterday dabs of soft flesh, grow up and pass through college and marry. I

hear myself in the studio with an old man's cough; the chisels slip under the mall and I can't move the clay about without help—all fading, decaying, but you. Candles burn out, hundreds of them, while your whiteness, your flame—

"Strange, too, how you light a world, a sky, eternity. A word we have no business with; a high-sounding word for a penny purpose. Look, we try to keep alive because it's necessary to life, to nature; and the effort, the struggle, breeds the dream. You can understand that. Men who ought to know say that love is nothing more." He rose and stood over her, towering and portentous against the curtained light. "I don't pretend to guess. I'm a creative artist—Simon Downige at Cottarsport—I have you. If it's God so much the better."

What principally swept over Linda was the knowledge that his possession of her must keep them always apart. The reality, all realities, were veils to Pleydon. Her momentary vision of things beyond brick and earth was magnified in him until everything else was obliterated. The fever! Oh, yes, that and his passion for work merged in his passion for her. She could bring him nothing; and she had a curious picture of

two Lindas visible to him here—the Linda that was actual and the other, the child. And of them it was the latter he cared most for, recreated out of his desire to defraud his loneliness, to repay the damage to his spirit realized in bronze.

She was, suddenly, too weary to stir or lift her hand; a depression as absolute as her flare of rage enveloped her. Now the reason for her coming seemed inexplicable, as if, for the while, her mind had failed. She repressed a shudder at the thought of being, through the long nights of his restlessness and wandering voice, alone with Pleydon. She hadn't, Linda discovered, any of the transmuting feeling for him which alone made surrender possible. She calculated mentally how long it would take her to reach the station, what train would be available.

Linda accepted dumbly the fatality to her own hope; for a few hours she had thought it possible to break out of the prison of circumstance, to walk free from all hindrance; but it had been vain. She gazed at Dodge Pleydon intensely—a comprehensive view of the man she had so nearly married, and who, more than any other force, dominated her being. It was already too late for anything but memory; she saw—filled with pity

for them both—hardly more than a strange old man with deadened hair and a yellow parchment-like skin. His suit of loose gray flannel gave her a feeling that it had been borrowed from some one she lovingly knew. The gesture of his hand, too, had been copied from a brilliant personage with a consuming impatience at all impotence.

"Remember me to Arnaud," he said, holding her gloves and the short fur cape. "Wait!" he cried sharply, turning to the bookcase against the wall. Pleydon fumbled in a box of lacquered gilt with a silk cord and produced a glove once white but now brown and fragile with age. "You never missed it," he proceeded in a gleeful triumph; "but then you had so many pairs. Once I sent you nine dozen together from Grenoble. They were nothing, but this you had worn. For a long while it kept the shape of your hand."

"Dodge," she tried without success to steady her voice, "it stayed with you anyhow, my—my hand."

"But yes," he answered impatiently. He returned the glove to its box, carefully tying the tasselled cord. Then, after clumsily helping her

with the cape, he accompanied her to the elevator. "There were other things," he told her. "Did you see the letters about the Hesperia affair? Heaps of them. Rodin. . . . But what can you expect in a world where there is no safety—" The stopping cage cut off his remark. She held out the hand that was less real to him than the dream.

"Good-by, Dodge."

"Yes, Linda. But watch that door, your skirt might easily be caught in it." He fussed over her safety until, abruptly, he seemed to rise in space, shut out from her by the limitations of her faith.

The evening overshadowed her in the train, as though she were whirling in the swiftest passage possible, through an indeterminate grayness, from day to night. The latter descended on her as she reached the steps of her home. It was still that; now it would continue to be until death. Nothing could ever again offer her change, release, vindication; nothing, that was, which might give her, for a day, what even her mother had plentifully experienced—the igniting exultation of the body.

It was inevitable, she thought, for Arnaud to be

in the library. He rose unsteadily as she stood in the doorway. "Linda," he articulated with difficulty. A book had rested open on the table beside him and, closing it, he put it back in its place. His arm trembled so that it took a painfully long while. Then he moved forward, still confused.

"What a confounded time you were gone. I had the most idiotic fancy. You see, it was so unlike you; none more exact in habit. All day. I didn't get to the Historical Society, it seemed so devilish far off. I'd never blame you for leaving an old man without any gumption." He must never think that again, she replied. Wasn't she, too, middle-aged?

XL

LINDA admitted, definitely, the loss of her youth; and yet a stubborn inner conviction remained that she was unchanged. In this she had for support her appearance; practically she was as freshly and gracefully pale as the girl who had married Arnaud Hallet. Even Vigné, with indelible traces of her motherhood, had faint lines absent from Linda's flawless countenance. Her children, and Arnaud, were immensely proud of her beauty; it had become a part—in the form of her ridiculously young air—of the family conversational resources. She was increasingly aware of its supreme significance to her.

One of her few certainties had been the discovery that, while small truths might be had from others, all that intimately and deeply concerned her was beyond questioning and advice. The importance of her attractiveness, for example, which seemed the base of her entire being, was completely out of accord with the accepted stand-

ard of values for middle-aged women. Other things, called moral and spiritual, she inferred, should take up her days and thoughts. There was a course of discipline—exactly like exercises in the morning—for the preparation of the willingness to die.

But such an attitude was eternally beyond her; she repudiated it with a revolt stringing every nerve indignantly tense. She had had, on the whole, singularly little from life but her fine body; it had always been the temple and altar of her service, and no mere wordy reassurance could now repay her for its swift or gradual destruction. The latter, except for accident, would be her fate; she was remarkably sound. In her social adventures, the balls to which, without Arnaud, she occasionally went, she was morbid in her sensitive dread of discovering, through a waning admiration, that she was faded.

It would be impossible to spend more care on her person than she had in the past; but that was unrelenting. Linda was inexorable in her demands on the establishments that made her suits and dresses. The slightest imperfection of fit exasperated her; and she regarded the endless change of fashions with contempt. This same

shifting, she observed, occurred not only in women's clothes but in the women themselves.

Linda remembered her mother, eternal in gaiety, but very obviously different from her in states of mind affecting her appearance. She was unable to define the change; but it was unmistakable—Stella Condon seemed a little old-fashioned. When now, to Lowrie's wife, Linda was unmistakably out-of-date. Lowrie, fast accomplishing all that had been predicted for him, had married a girl incomprehensible to his mother. Observing this later feminine development she had the baffled feeling of inspecting a creature of a new order.

To Linda, Jean Tynedale, now a Hallet, seemed harder than ever her own famous coldness had succeeded in being. This came mostly from Jean's imposing education; there had been, in addition to the politest of finishing schools, college—a woman's concern, Bryn Mawr—and then post-graduate honors in a noteworthy university. She was entirely addressed, in a concrete way, to the abstract problems of social progress and hygiene; and, under thirty, the animating spirit, as well as financial support, of an incredible number of Settlements and allied undertakings. She

spoke crisply before civic and other clubs; even, in the interest of suffrage, addressing nondescript audiences from a box on the street.

But it was her unperturbed dissection of the motives of sex, the denouncement of a criminal mysterious ignorance, that most daunted Linda. She listened to Jean with a series of distinct shocks to her sense of propriety. What she had agreed to consider a nameless attribute of women, or, if anything more exact, the power of their charm over men, the other defined in unequivocal scientific terms. She understood every impulse veiled for Linda in a reticence absolutely needful to its appeal.

This, of course, the elder distrusted; just as she had no approval for Jean's public activities. Linda didn't like public women; her every instinct cried for a fine seclusion, fine in the meaning of an appropriate setting for feminine distinction, the magic of dress and cut roses. Her private inelegant word for Lowrie's wife was "bold;" indeed, describing to herself the younger woman's patronage of her bearing, she descended to her mother's colloquialism "brass."

She thought this sitting at a dinner-table which held Vigné and her husband and Lowrie and Jean

Hallet. Arnaud, drawing life from the vitality of an atmosphere charged with youth, was unflagging in splendid spirits and his valorous wit. Jean would never inspire the affection Arnaud had given her; nor the passion that, in Pleydon, had burned unfed even by hope.

Her thoughts slipped away from the present to the sculptor. Three years had vanished since she had gone with an intention of finality to his apartment, and in that time he had neither been in their house nor written. Linda had expected this; she was without the desire to see or hear from him. Dodge Pleydon was finished for her; as a man, a potentiality, he had departed from her life. He was a piece with her memories, the triumphs of her young days. Without an actual knowledge of the moment of its accomplishment she had passed over the border of that land, leaving it complete and fair and radiant for her lingering view. Whether or not she had been happy was now of no importance; the magic of its light showed only a garden and a girl in white with a black bang against her blue eyes.

The bang, the blueness of gaze, were still hers; but, only this morning, brush in hand, the former had offered less resistance in its arrangement; it

was thinner, and the color perceptibly not so dense. At this, with a chill edge of fear, she had determined to go at once to her hairdresser; no one, neither Arnaud, who loved its luster, nor an unsympathetic bold scrutiny, a scrutiny of brass, should see that she was getting gray. There was no fault about her figure; she had that for her satisfaction; she was more graceful than Jean's square thinness, more slim than Vigné's maternal presence.

Linda had the feeling that she was engaged in a struggle with time, a ruthless antagonist whom she viewed with a personal enmity. Time must, would, of course, triumph in the end; but there would be no sign of her surrender in the meanwhile; she wouldn't bend an inch, relinquish by a fraction the pride and delicacy of her person. The skilful dyeing of her hair to its old absolute blackness, as natural and becoming in appearance as ever, was a symbol of her determination to cheat an intolerable tyranny.

The process, dismaying her soul, she bore with a rigid fortitude; as she endured the coldness of a morning bath from which, often, she was slow to react. This, to her, was widely different from the futile efforts of her mother, those women of

the past, to preserve for practical ends their flushes of youth and exhilaration. She felt obscurely that she was serving a deeper reality created by the hands of Pleydon, Arnaud's faith and pure pleasure, all that countless men had seen in her for admiration, solace and power.

But it was inevitable, she told herself bitterly, that she should hear the first intimation of her decline from Jean Hallet. Rather, she overheard it, the discussion of her, from the loiterers at breakfast as she moved about the communicating library. Jean's emphatic slightly rough-textured voice arrested her in the arrangement of a bowl of zinnias:

"You can't say just where she has failed, but it's evident. Perhaps a general dryness. Perfectly natural. Thoroughly silly to fight against it—" Vigné interrupted her. "I think mother's wonderful. I can't remember any other woman nearly her age who looks so enchanting in the evening."

Linda quietly left the flowers as they were and went up to the room that had been her father's. It was now used as a spare bedroom; and she had turned into it, in place of her own chamber, instinctively, without reason. She had kept it ex-

actly as it had been when Amelia Lowrie first conducted her there, as it was when her father, a boy, slept under the white canopy.

Linda advanced to the mirror; and, her hands so tightly clenched that the finger-nails dug into the palms, forced herself to gaze steadily at the wavering reflection. It seemed to her that there had been a malicious magic in Jean's detraction; for immediately, as though the harm had been wrought by the girl's voice, she saw that her clear freshness had gone. Her face had a wax-like quality, the violet shadows under her eyes were brown. Who had once called her a gardenia? Now she was wilting—how many gardenias had she seen droop, turn brown Her heart beat with a disturbing echo in her ears, and, with a slight gasp that resembled a sob, she sank on one of the uncomfortable painted chairs.

What, above every other sensation, oppressed her was a feeling of terrific loneliness—the familiar isolation magnified until it was past bearing. Yet, there was Arnaud, infallible in his tender comprehension, she ought to go to him at once and find support. But it was impossible; all that he could give her was, to her special necessity, useless. She had never been able to estab-

lish herself in his sympathy; the reason for that lay in the fact that she could bring nothing similar in return.

The room—except for the timed clangor of the electric cars, like the measure of lost minutes—was quiet. The photograph of Bartram Hallet in cricketing clothes had faded until it was almost indistinguishable. Soon the faint figure would disappear entirely, as though the picture were amenable to the relentless principle operating in her.

The peace about her finally lessened her acute suffering, stilled her heart. She told herself with a show of vigor that she was a coward, a charge that roused an unexpected activity of denial. She discovered that cowardice was intolerable to her. What had happened, too, was so far out of her hands that a trace of philosophical acceptance, recognition, came to her support. The loveliest woman alive must do the same, meet in a looking-glass—that eternal accompanying sibyl—her disaster. She rose, her lips firmly set, composed and pale, and returned to the neglected flowers in the library.

Vigné entered and put an affectionate arm about her shoulders, repeating—unconscious that

Linda had heard the discussion which had given it being—the conviction that her mother was wonderful, specially in the black dinner dress with the girdle of jet. With no facility of expression she gave her daughter's arm a quick light pressure.

From then she watched the slow progress of age with a new realization, but an unabated distaste and, wherever it was possible, a determined artifice. Arnaud had failed swiftly in the past months; and, while she was inspecting the impaired supports of an arbor in the garden, he came to her with an unopened telegram. "I abhor these things," he declared fretfully; "they are so sudden. Why don't people write decent letters any more! It's like the telephone. . . . Good manners have been ruined."

She tore open the envelope, read the brief line within, and, a hand suddenly put out to the arbor, sank on its bench. There had been rain, but a late sun was again pouring over the sparkling grass, and robins were singing with a lyrical clearness. "What is it?" Arnaud demanded anxiously, tremulous in the unsparing sunlight. She replied:

"Dodge died this morning."

His concern was as much for her as for Pley-

don's death. "I'm sorry, Linda," his hand was on her shoulder. "It is a shock to you. A fine man, a genius—none stronger in our day. When you were young and for so long after. . . . I was lucky, Linda, to get you; have you all this while. Nothing in Pleydon's life, not even his success, could have made up for your loss."

She wondered dully if Dodge had missed her, if Arnaud Hallet had ever had her in his possession. The robins filled the immaculate air with song. It was impossible that Dodge, who was so imperious in his certainty that he would never say good-by to her, was dead.

XLI

THERE was a revival of public interest in the destruction of Pleydon's statue at Hesperia, the papers again printed accounts colored by a variety of attitudes unembarrassed by fact; and the serious journals united in a dignity of eminently safe praise. At first Linda made an effort to preserve these; but soon their similarity, her inability to find, among sonorous periods, any trace of Dodge's spirit—in reality she knew so blindingly much more than the most penetrating critical intellect—caused her to leave the reviews unread. No one else living had understood Pleydon; and when descriptions of his life spoke of the austerity in his later years, his fanatical aversion to women, Linda thought of the brittle glove in the gilt-lacquer box.

Her own emotion, it seemed to her, was the most confused of all the unintelligible pressures that had converted her life into an enigma. She had a distinct sense of overwhelming loss—of something, Linda was obliged to add, she had

never owned. However, she realized that during Pleydon's life she had dimly expected a happy accident of explanation; until almost the last, yes—after she had returned from that ultimate journey, she had been conscious of the presence of hope. The hope had been for herself, created out of her constant baffled dissatisfaction.

But now the man in whom solely she had been expressed, the only possible reason for her obstinate pride, had left her in a world that, but for Arnaud's fondness, looked on her without remark. The loss of her distinction had been finally evident at balls, in the dresses in which Vigné had thought her so wonderful, and she dropped them. Here, she repeated, was when affection, generously radiated through life, should have reflected over her a tranquil and contented joy. She had never given it, and she was without the ability to receive. She admitted to herself, with a little annoyed laugh, that her old desire for inviolable charm, for the integrity of a memorable slimness, was unimpaired. It was, she thought, too ridiculously inappropriate for words.

Yet it had changed slightly into the recognition that what so often had been called her beauty was

all she now had for sustenance, all she had ever had. Her mind returned continually to Pleydon, and—deep in the mystery of his passion—she was suddenly invaded by an insistent desire to see the monument at Cottarsport. She spoke to Arnaud at once about this; and alone, through his delicacy of perception, Linda went to Boston the following day.

The further ride to Cottarsport followed the sea—a brilliant serene blue, fretted on the landward side by innumerable bare promontories, hideous towns and factories, but bowed in a far unbroken arc at the immaculate horizon. She left the train for a hilly cluster of houses, gray and low like the rock everywhere apparent, dropping to a harbor that bore a company of motionless boats with half-spread drying sails.

The day was at noon, and the sky, blue like the sea, held, still as the anchored schooners, faint, chalky symmetrical clouds. Linda found the Common without guidance; and at once saw, on its immovable base of rugged granite, the bronze statue of Simon Downige. It stood well in advance of what, evidently, was the court-house, the white steeple Dodge had described. She found a bench by a path in the thin grass; and there, her

gloved hands folded, at rest in her lap, her gaze and longing were lifted to the fixed aspiration.

From where she sat the seated figure was projected against the sky; Simon's face was turned toward the west; the West that, for him, was the future, but which for Linda represented all the past. This conviction flooded her with unutterable sadness. A sense of failure weighed on her, no less heavy for the fact that it was perpetually vague. Her thoughts gathered about Dodge himself; and she recalled the curious vividness of his vision of her as a child, perhaps ten. She, too, tried to remember that time and age. It was almost in her grasp, but her realization was spoiled by absurd mental fragments—the familiar illusion of a leopard and a rider with bright hair, a forest with the ascending voices of angels, and an ominous squat figure with a slowly nodding plumed head.

The vista of a hotel returned, a fleet recollection of marble columns and a wide red carpet . . . the white gleam and carbolized smell of a drug-store . . . a thick magazine in a brown cover. These, changed into emotions of mingled joy and pain, shifted in bright or dim colors and sensations. There was a slow heavy plodding of feet, now

above her head, the passage of a carried weight; and, in a flash of perception, she knew it was a coffin. She raised her clasped hands to her breast, crying into the sunny silence, to the figure of Simon Downige lost in dream:

"He died that night, at the Boscombe, after he had told me about the meadows with silk tents—"

Her memory, thrilling with the echoed miraculous chord of the child of ten, sitting gravely, alone, among the shrill satins and caustic voices of a feminine throng, was complete. She saw herself, Linda Condon, as objectively as Pleydon's described vision: there was a large bow on her straight black hair, and, from under the bang, her gaze was clear and wondering. How marvelously young she was! The vindictive curiosity of the questioning women, intent on their rings, brought out her eager defense of her mother, the effort to explain away the ugly fact that—that Mr. Jasper was married.

She saw Linda descending the marble stairs to the lower floor where the games were kept in a somber corridor, and heard a voice halting her irresolute passage:

"Hello, Bellina."

That wasn't her name, and she corrected him,

waiting afterward to listen to a strange fairy-like tale. The solitary, sick-looking man, with inky shadows under fixed eyes, was so actual that she recaptured the pungent drift of his burning cigarette. He talked about love in a bitter intensity that hurt her. Yet, at first, he had said that she was lovely, a touch of her . . . forever in the memory. Mostly, however, he spoke of a beautiful passion. It had largely vanished, his explanation continued; men had come to worship other things. Plato started it.

She recalled Plato, as well, in connection with Dodge; now, it appeared to her, that remote name had always been at the back of her consciousness. There were other names, other men, of an age long ago in Italy. Their ideal, religion, was contained in the adoration of a woman, but not her body—it was a love of her spirit, the spirit their purity of need recognized, perhaps helped to create. It was a passion as different as possible in essence from all she had observed about her. It was useless for common purposes, withheld from Arnaud Hallet.

The man, seriously addressing the serious uncomprehending interest of ten, proceeded with a description of violins—but she had heard them

through all her life—and a parting that left only a white glove for remembrance. Then he had repeated that line, in Italian, which, not long back, her husband had recalled. The old gesture toward the stars, the need to escape fatality—how she had suffered from that!

Yet it was a service of the body, a faith spiritual because, here, it was never to be won, never to be realized in warm embrace. It had no recognition in flesh, and it was the reward of no prayer or humility or righteousness. Only beauty knew and possessed it. His image grew dim like the blurring of his voice by pain and the shadow of death. Linda's thoughts and longing turned again to Dodge; it seemed to her that he no more than took up the recital where the other was silent.

Pleydon—was it at Markue's party or later?—talking about "Homer's children" had meant the creations of great artists, in sound or color or words or form, through that supreme love unrealized in other life. The statue of Simon Downige, towering before her against the sky and above the sea, held in immutable bronze his conviction. The meager bundle and crude stick rested by shoes clogged with mud; Simon's body was crushed with weariness; but under the sweat-plas-

tered brow his gaze pierced indomitable and undismayed to the vision of a place of truth.

She was choked by a sharp rush of joy at Dodge's accomplishment, an entire understanding of the beauty he had vainly explained, the deathless communication of old splendid courage, an unshaken divine need, to succeeding men and hope. This had been hers. She had always felt her presence in his success; but, until now, it had belonged exclusively to him. Dodge had, in his love, absorbed her, and that resulted in the statues the world applauded. She, Linda thought, had been an element easily dismissed. It had hurt her pride almost beyond endurance, the pride that took the form of an inner necessity for the survival of her grace—all she had.

She had even asked him, in a passing resentment, why he had never directly modeled her, kept, with his recording genius, the shape of her features. She had gone to him in a blinder vanity for the purpose of stamping her participation in his triumph on the stupid insensibility of their world. How incredible! But at last she could see that he had preserved her spirit, her secret self, from destruction. He had cheated death of her fineness. The delicate perfection of her youth

would never perish, never be dulled by old age or corrupted in death. It had inspired and entered into Pleydon's being, and he had lifted it on the pedestal rising between the sea and sky.

She was in the Luxembourg, in that statue of Cotton Mather, the somber flame, about which he had written with a comment on the changing subjects of his creations. From the moment when he sat beside her on the divan in that room stifling with incense, with the naked glimmer of women's shoulders, she had been the source of his power. She had been his power. Linda smiled quietly, in retrospect, at her years of uncertainty, the feeling of waste, that had robbed her of peace. How complete her mystification had been! And, all the while, she had had the thrill of delight, of premonition, born in her through the forgotten hour with the man who had died.

The sun, moving in celestial space, shifted the shadow about the base of Simon Downige's monument. The afternoon was advancing. She rose and turned, looking out over the sea to the horizon as brightly sharp as a curved sword. The life of Cottarsport, below her, proceeded in detached figures, an occasional unhurried passage. The boats in the harbor were slumberous. It was time

to go. She gazed again, for a last view, at the bronze seated figure; and a word of Pleydon's, but rather it was Greek, wove its significance in the placid texture of her thoughts. Its exact shape evaded her, a difficult word to recall—*Katharsis*, the purging of the heart. About her was the beating of the white wings of a Victory sweeping her—a faded slender woman in immaculate gloves and a small matchless hat—into a region without despair.

THE END

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